半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

VOLUME 12

THREE FOOT BATTLE

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

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Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams,
Striving to Grow into a Rising River.

DARK HORSE MANGA™

半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

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Chapter On Tenka Fubu

No. 4: Oda-Tokugawa Alliance, Part 2

S...STOP IT!

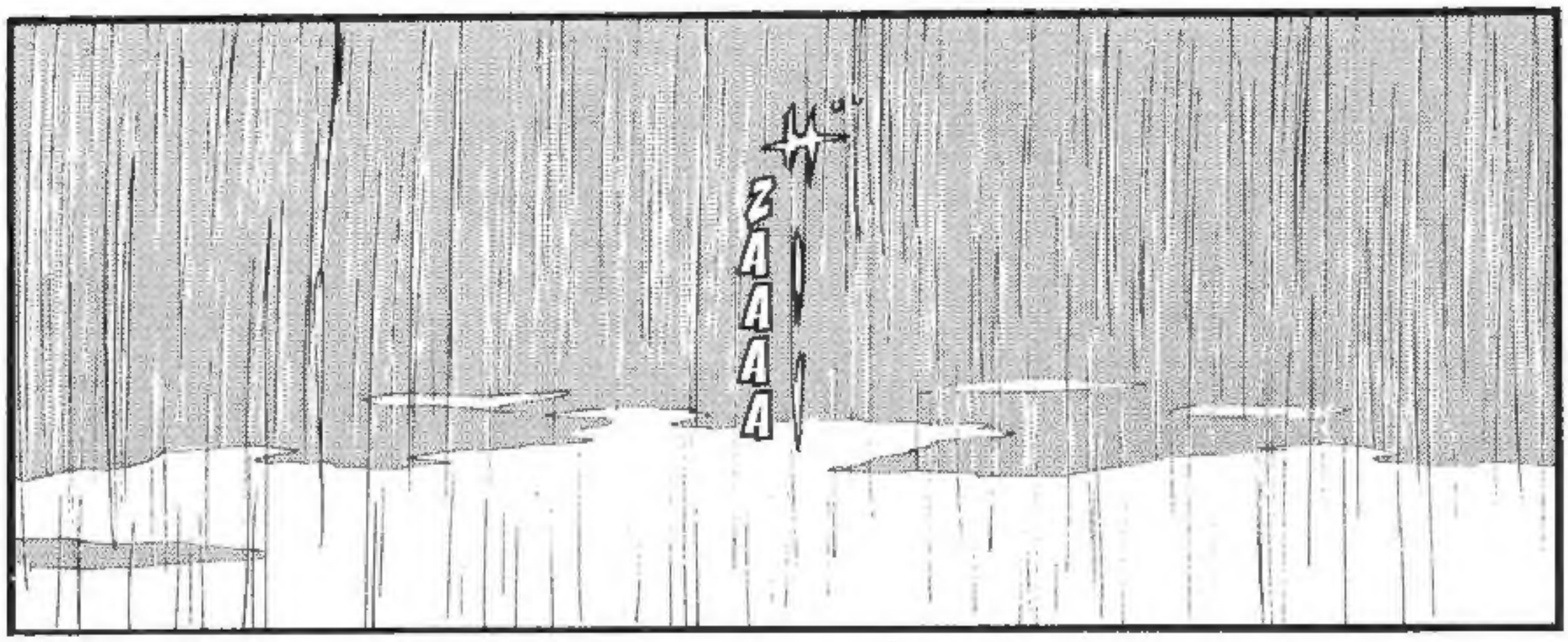
NOOO!!

NOOO! YOU'RE FILTHY!

FILTH!

FILTH!

FILTH!


ZAAAA

RAIN. THE MOTHER LET ME DO IT TO HER IN PLACE OF HER DAUGHTER.
SHE THOUGHT IT WOULD SERVE TO SHOW HER GRATITUDE FOR SAVING THEIR LIVES.

SHE FORGOT SHE WAS A MOTHER AND EXPOSED TOO MUCH OF HER LEWD INSTINCTS.

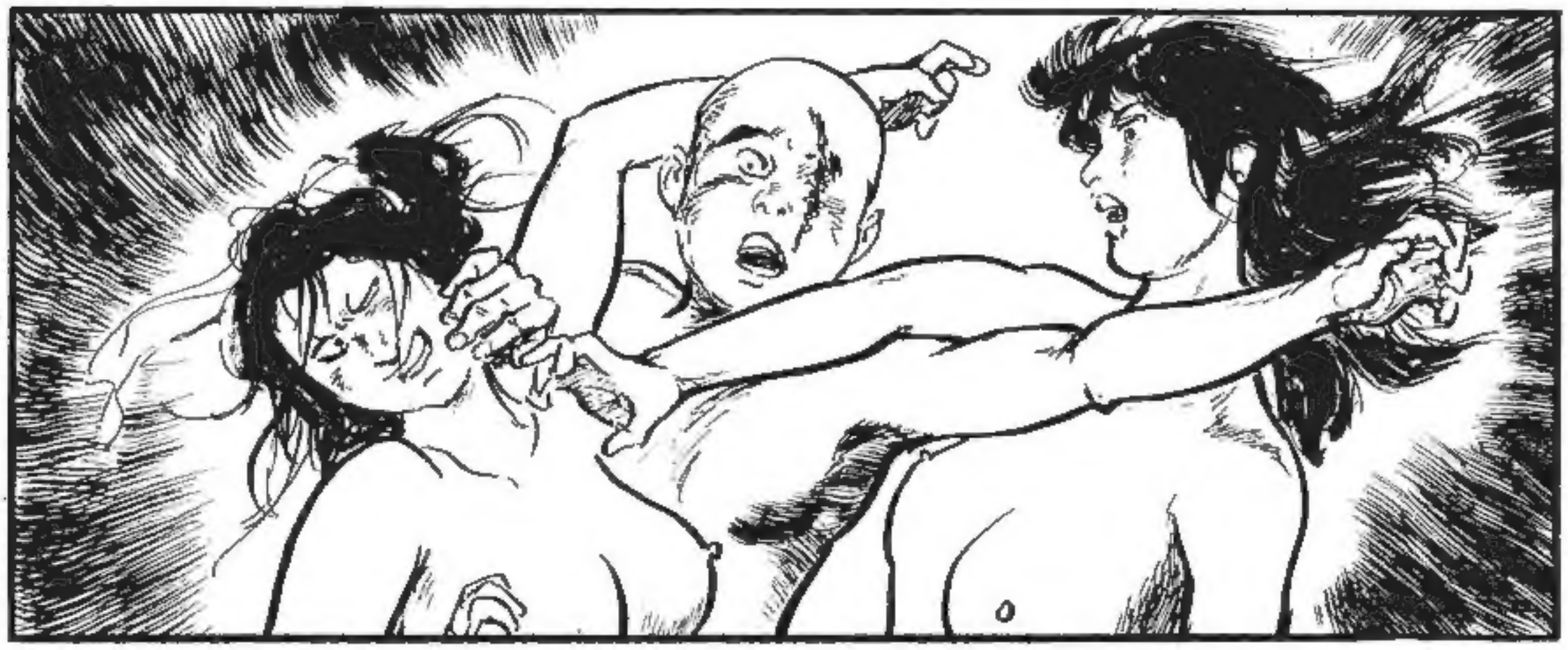
BUT HALFWAY THROUGH, HER LECHEROUS NATURE AWOKE.

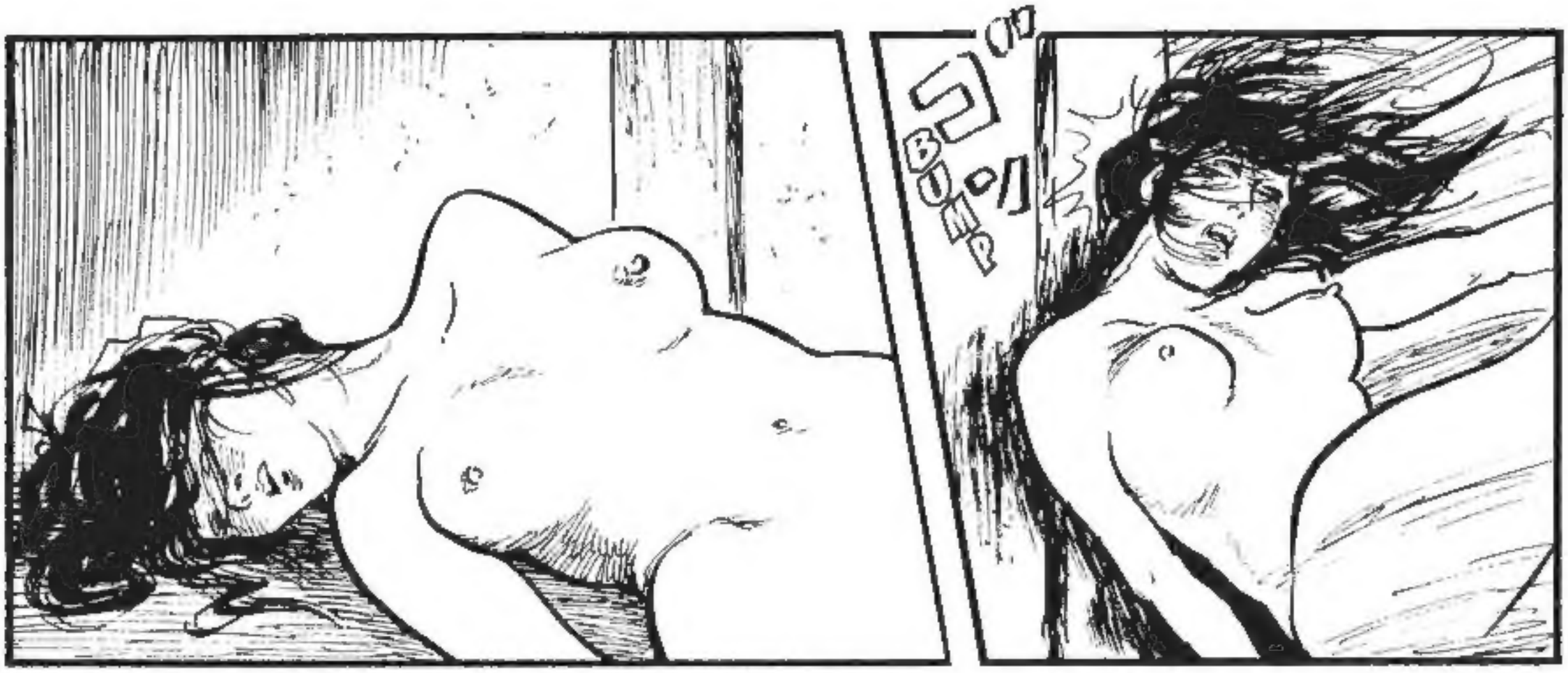
...THE AMOROUS FIRE WOULD NOT HAVE ALIGHTED IN THE DAUGHTER'S HEART.

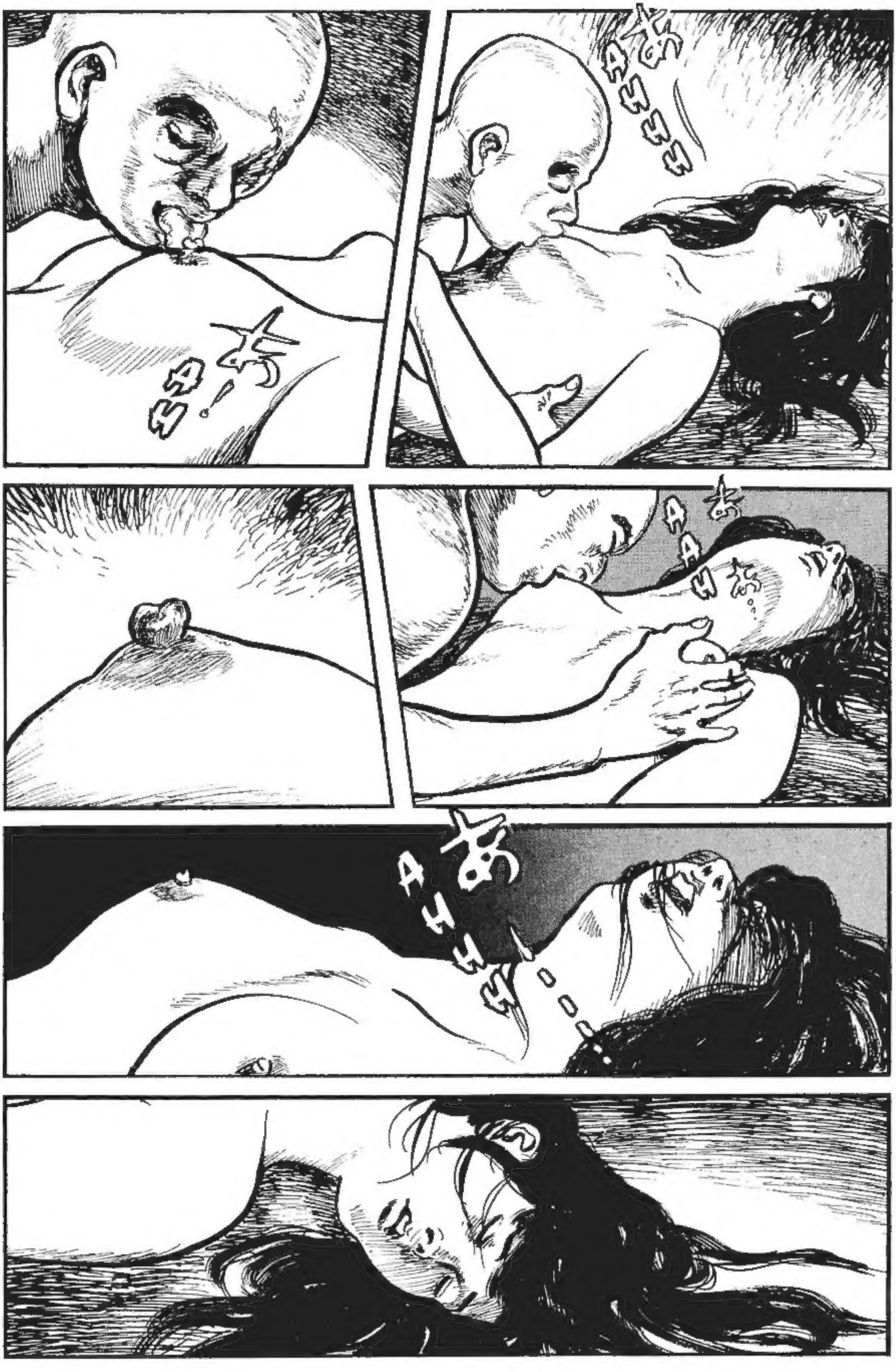
IF SHE'D PRETENDED TO SUFFER, ENDURING DESPERATELY AS A MOTHER WITH HER EYES SHUT TIGHT...

BUT SHE WHIMPERED AND SQUEALED, WAGGING HER HIPS. NOT JUST ONCE, BUT REPEATEDLY, ASKING FOR MORE, NOT KNOWING HOW TO BE SATIATED. HER CRIES OF PLEASURE--SOMETIMES LOUD, SOMETIMES LOW AND LONG--SHOOK THE DAUGHTER TO HER CORE.

ESPECIALLY SINCE THIS TOOK PLACE RIGHT AFTER THE BLOODY FIGHTING, THEY WERE MORE PRONE TO TRANSFORM. IT MADE THEM INTO BEASTS.




BUMP
HAHAHA
ZOOO!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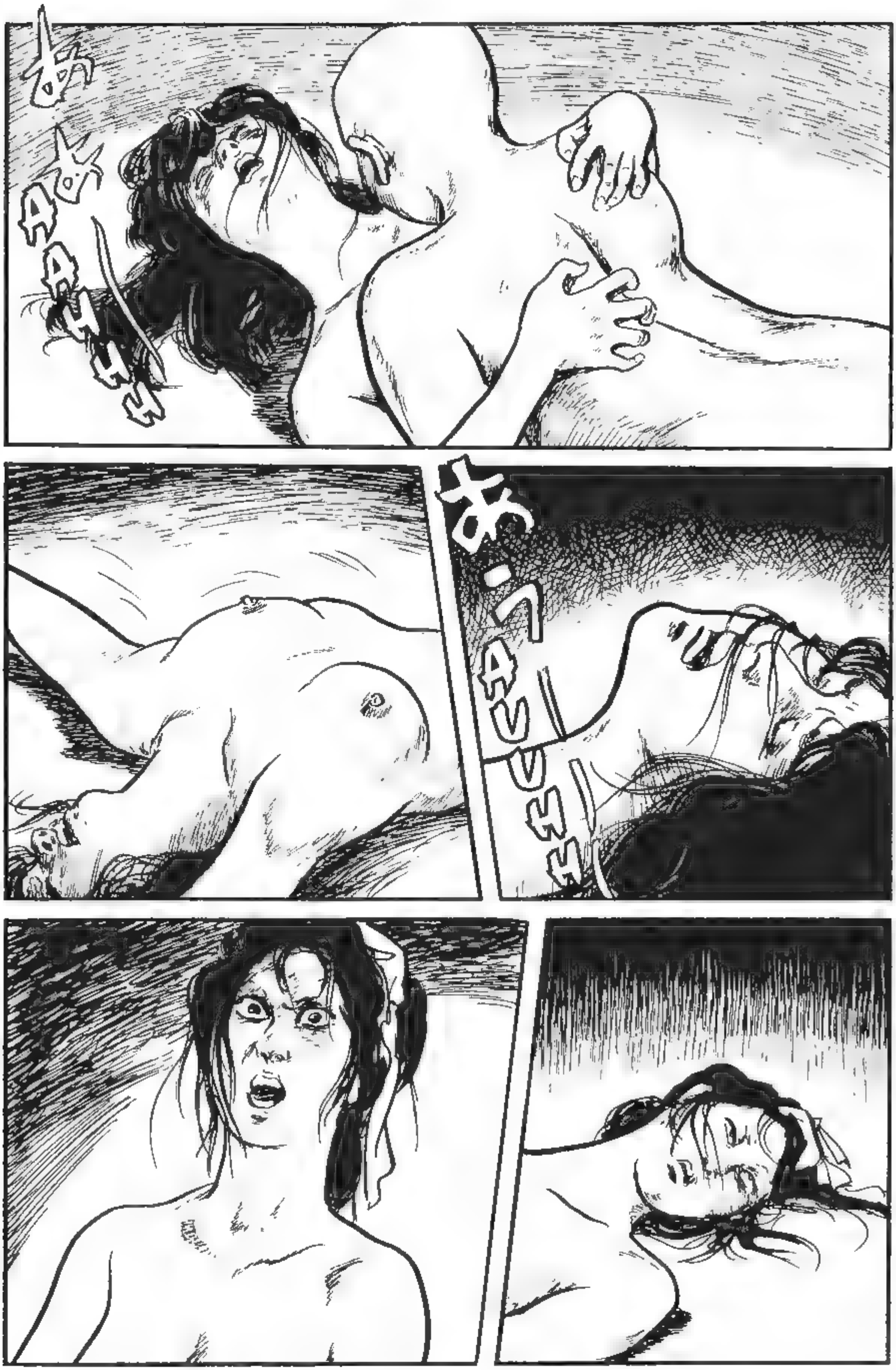
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THOOM
PW

WAAAGG

AHH

AHH

AHH

AHH

AHH

ZAAA

YOU KNOW, RAIN?

THE EVIL NATURE THAT SITS DORMANT DEEP IN THE HUMAN HEART IS A SCARY THING. ONE LOUD GUNSHOT DRAGGED MINE TO THE SURFACE. AND THE WOMEN'S LEAPT OUT NEXT.

EVER SINCE, WE KEPT AT IT, DAY AND NIGHT.

WE WANTED MORE. WE WERE NEVER SATIATED. I PRACTICED MY GUN SKILLS ONLY WHEN I HAD IDLE MOMENTS BETWEEN SEX.

I HAD NOTHING ELSE TO DO. I COULDN'T DO ANYTHING WITH JUST ONE EYE ANYWAY.

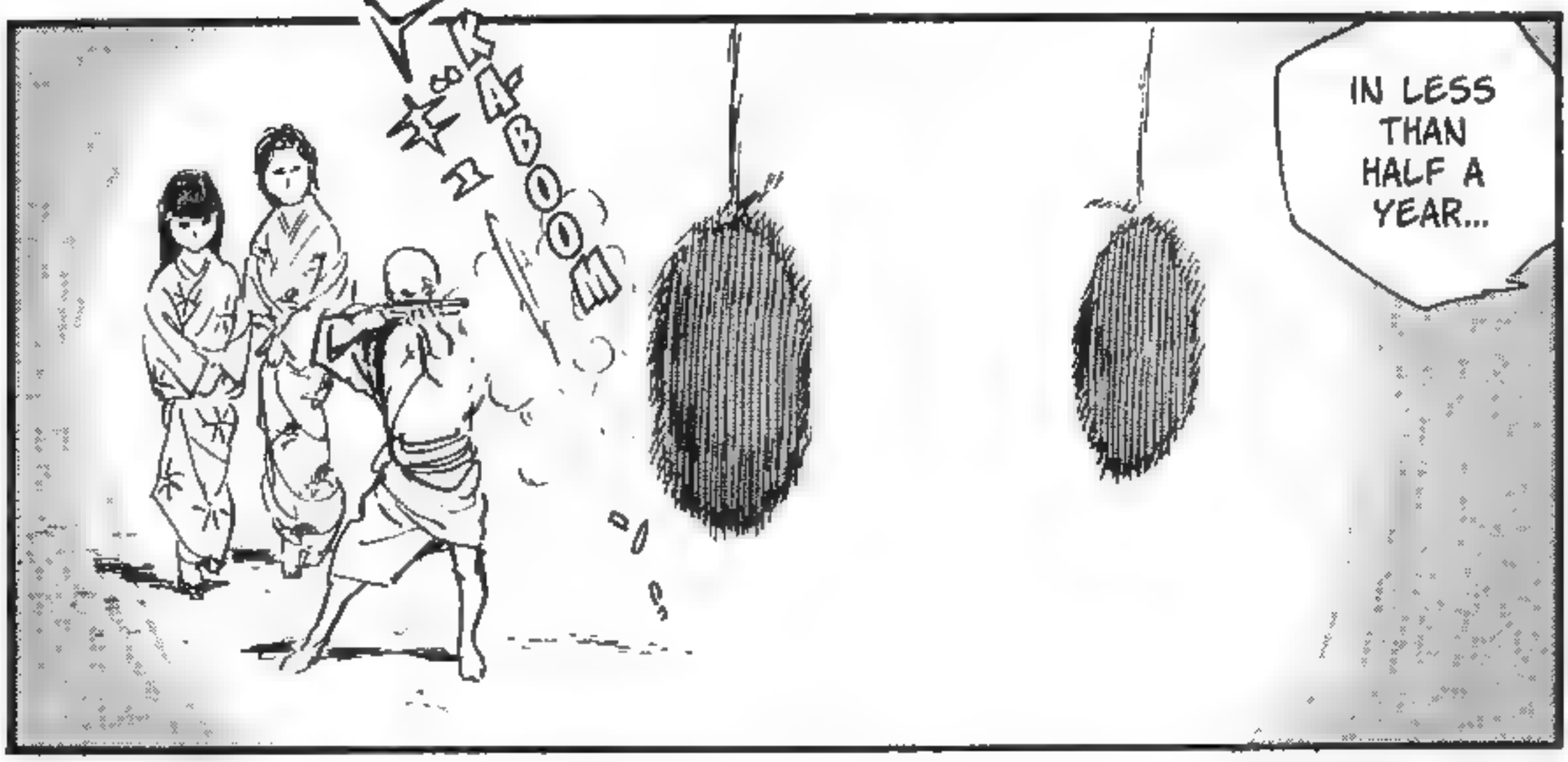
THE THING IS, PEOPLE USE ONE EYE WHEN THEY SHOOT. SO IT SUITED ME PERFECTLY.

IT SOUNDS GOOD WHEN I SAY I WAS TRAINING MYSELF. BUT THE FACT IS, I KEPT SHOOTING ONLY BECAUSE I WANTED TO HEAR THE SOUND.

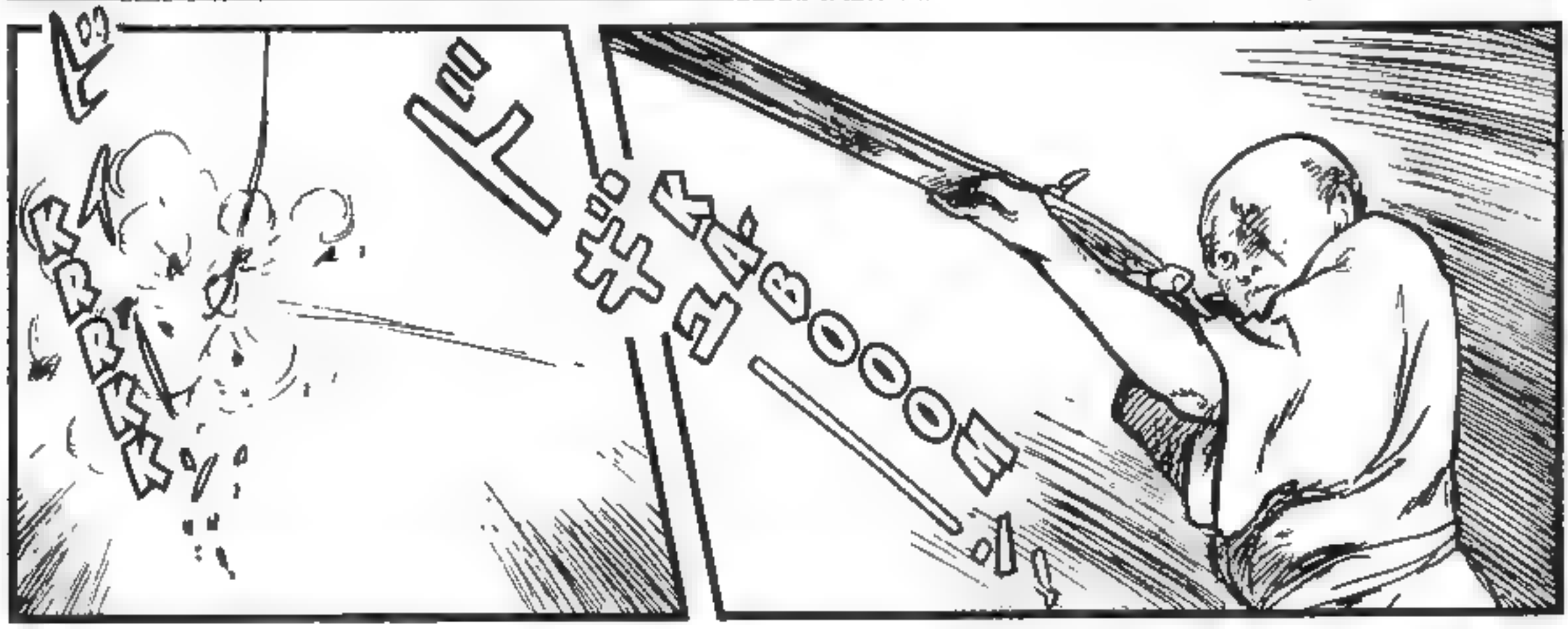
KLIK KLIK

I TAUGHT MYSELF HOW TO MAKE BULLETS. AS FOR THE POWDER, MY WOMEN RAN AROUND AND PROCURED IT WHEREVER THEY COULD.

IT'S NO WONDER I BECAME GOOD AT SHOOTING.


IN LESS THAN HALF A YEAR...
KABOOM

KRRRR


KBBBBK
KABOOOOM

I BECAME SO SKILLED THAT PEOPLE THOUGHT I MIGHT EVEN SHOOT THROUGH A NEEDLE HOLE IF I WANTED TO.

RUMORS OF SUCH MASTERY WILL SPREAD FAST. HEARING WHAT I CAN DO, HACHIYA *SUPPA* CAME TO HIRE ME.

I HAVE SEX WITH MY WOMEN BEFORE AND AFTER I GUN SOMEONE DOWN. THAT'S THE ONLY THING I LOOK FORWARD TO IN LIFE.

THERE'S NOTHING BETTER. IT'S THE GREATEST PLEASURE EVER.

RAIN. I'VE SHOT AND KILLED MANY PEOPLE.

AND YOU KNOW, RAIN? I CAN SHOOT NOBUNAGA, WHO IS ABOUT TO REACH THE TOP OF THE LADDER AND TAKE CONTROL OF THE NATION. IN SHORT, I CAN PUT RULING POWER TO DEATH.

I DON'T DRINK *SAKE*. I DON'T NEED SCRUMPTIOUS FOOD. I KNOW ONLY TWO WOMEN, AND I DON'T WANT TO KNOW ANY OTHERS.

I AM SATISFIED IN EVERY WAY.

MY WOMEN SHOULD ARRIVE SOON.

I'M SO HAPPY IT SCARES ME. I AM THE ONE WHO'LL CHANGE THE DIRECTION OF THE NATION. CAN YOU IMAGINE?

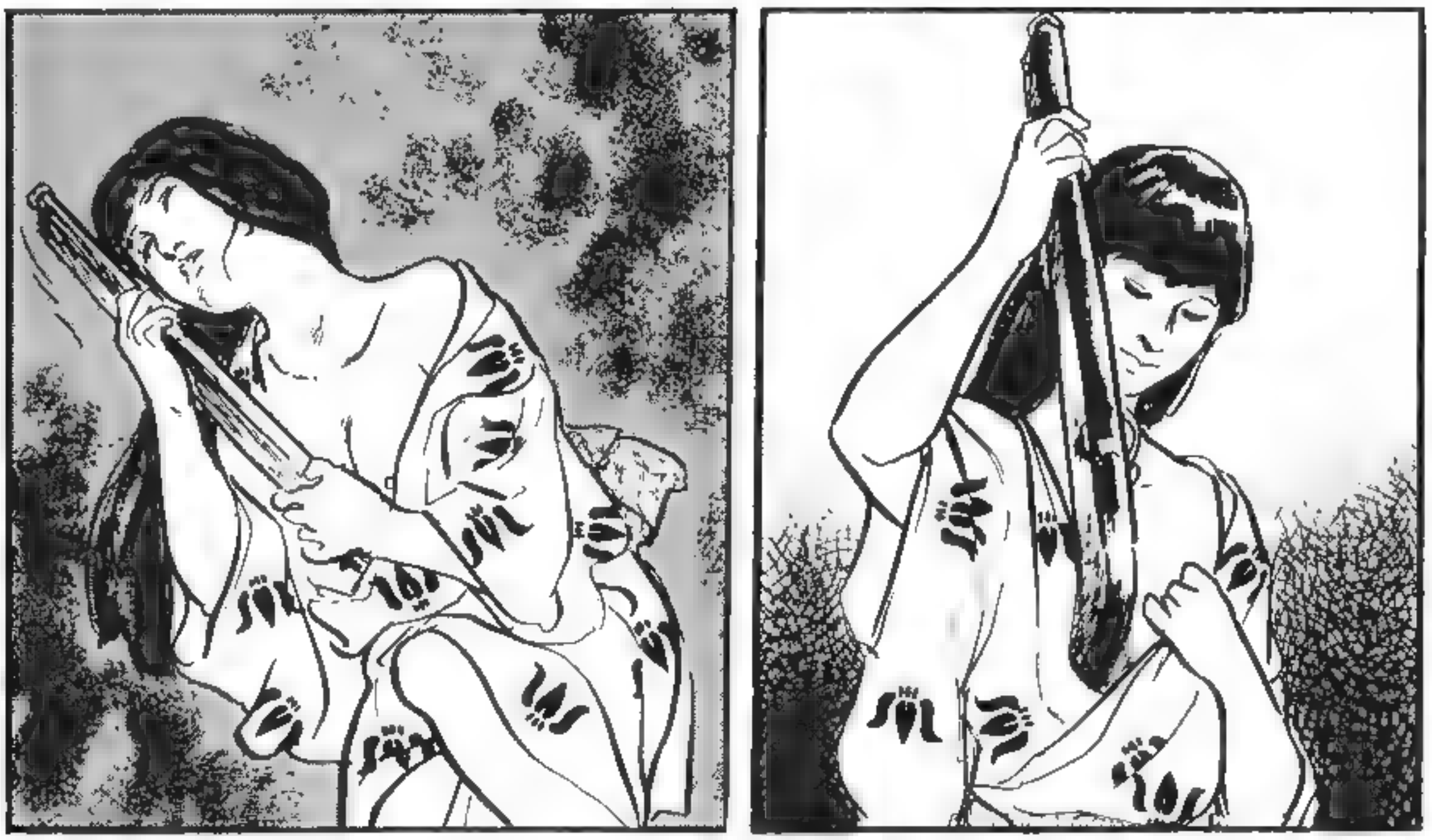
*SIGN· ODA NOBUNAGA DIES HERE.

IT DOESN'T BOTHER ME TO GET WET, BECAUSE I DON'T FEEL COLD AT ALL, YOU SEE?

RAIN.

YES.

HE CAME?



HAA
HAA
HAA

ドドドド…!!

ドドドド…!!

AAAAHHH
AHHH

ON MAY 19TH...
NOBUNAGA LEFT KYOTO AND
WAS ON THE WAY BACK
TO HIS CASTLE IN GIFU.
AND AS A MATTER OF COURSE,
HE USED THE CHIGUSA
PASS, WHERE ZENJUBŌ
LAY IN WAIT.

WHAT IS IT?

I HAVE NEWS.

SLURP

ZUZZ

ZUZZ

SLURRP

DDD

THAT'S GREAT.

HM.

BOTH HIDEYOSHI-*DONO* AND IEYASU-*SAMA* COMPLETED THEIR DUTY AS REAR GUARDS AND ESCAPED SAFELY.

YES SIR!

I MUST THANK THEM. LET THEM THROUGH.

HOW FAST THEY ARE. THEY CERTAINLY ARE THE LEADERS OF *SUPPA*.

IT IS IEYASU-*SAMA'S* VASSAL, HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI-*DONO*, AND HIDEYOSHI-*DONO'S* VASSAL, HACHISUKA KOROKU, WHO HAVE COME TO INFORM US.

HA HA HA HA

HA HA HA HA

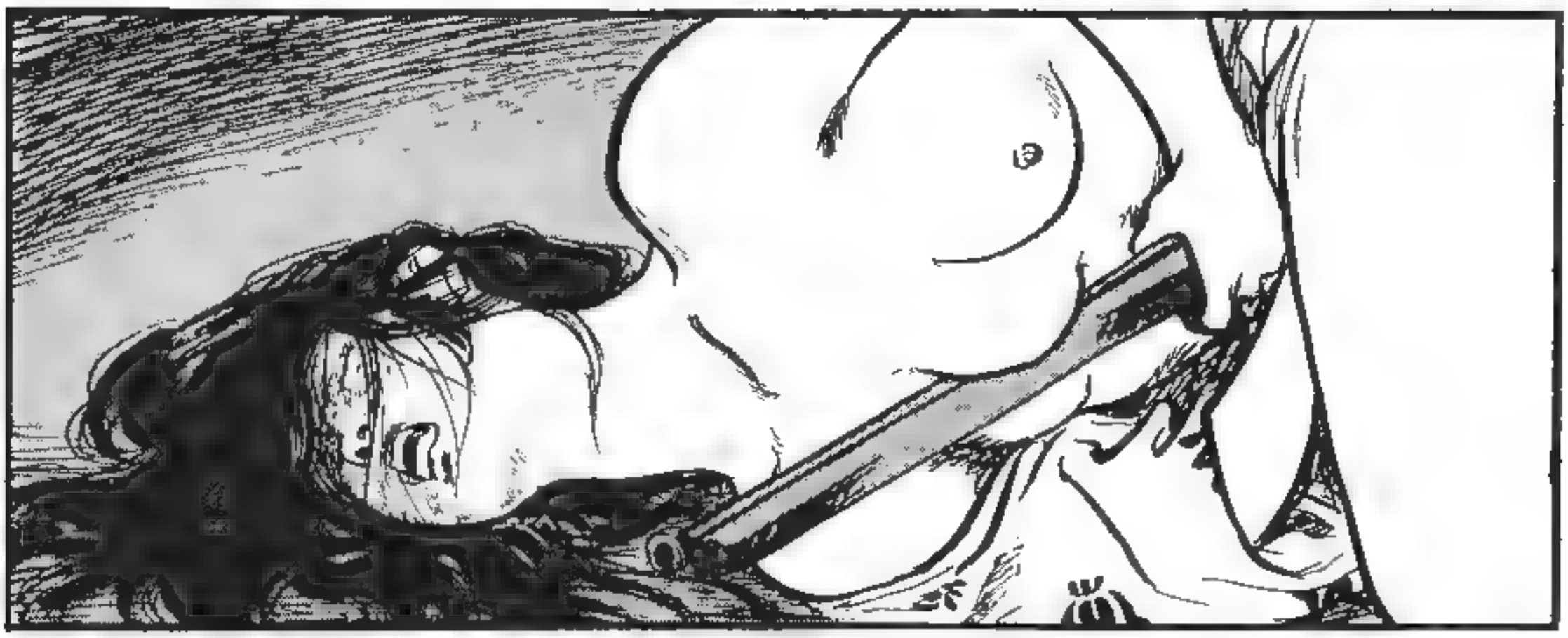
HA HA HA HA

HA HA HA HA

THAT MEANS NAGAMASA JOINED FORCES WITH A SCARECROW WHO WOULDN'T FOLLOW THROUGH. HE MUST BE IRATE, CLENCHING HIS FISTS AND GRINDING HIS TEETH, I IMAGINE. HA HA HA HA HA.

THE ASAKURA FORCES DIDN'T CHASE YOU? HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.

ZUNZ
ZUNZ



ARGH
AWK
AWK
ARGH
AAAS
HA
HA

YES SIR! I HEAR CHIGUSA PASS IS RIDDLED WITH THEM, SO RIDING ON A PALANQUIN WILL BE BEST FOR YOUR SAFETY.

WHAT? FALLING ROCKS?

IT'S NOT FALLING ROCKS. I BET YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT BULLETS.

WE'LL REMAKE YOUR PALANQUIN TO BE STURDIER THAN ANY OTHER.

HA

INDEED, IF SOMEONE WANTS TO TARGET ME, CHIGUSA PASS IS UNBEATABLE AS A LOCATION.

HA HA HA HA HA HA. HA HA HA HA HA.

FROM WHAT WE HEAR, A MASTER GUNMAN CALLED "DOUBLE BULLETS" ZENJUBŌ IS AFTER YOU.

I WILL BE VERY CAREFUL AS I PROCEED, SO YOU NEED NOT WORRY.

WHAT?

HOW ABOUT MARCHING IN DISGUISE?

IF I'M AFRAID OF A GUN OR TWO, HOW CAN I EVER GO INTO THE BATTLEFIELD, WHERE HUNDREDS OF RIFLES BREATHE FIRE?

THE ASSASSIN WILL BE TAKEN BY SURPRISE, AND WON'T HAVE ANY CLUE AS TO WHERE HE SHOULD AIM.

I AM SUGGESTING THAT YOUR ENTIRE ARMY MARCH THROUGH CHIGUSA PASS AND ENTER GIFU IN COSTUME.

HM.

THEY'LL ALL BE SO STUNNED THEY'LL FORGET THAT YOU RETURNED AFTER A CRUSHING DEFEAT.

AND YOU WILL BEMUSE EVERYONE IN YOUR TERRITORY, INCLUDING YOUR CLANSMEN.

HANZŌ, NO WONDER YOU'RE THE BEST OF IGA. WHAT A GREAT IDEA!

GREAT IDEA!

IT'S ABOUT TIME WE GET READY.

GOOD.

NO.

ANY WIND?

THEY'RE COMING!

BOOOOO

RSSS RSSS

BU'.. BU'..
BUOOOO BUOOOO
TANG TANG
TANG

TANG TANG TANG

BUOOOOO
BUOOOOO

NOBUNAGA... HOW REMARK-ABLE...

DON'T PANIC.

D... DARLING...

THE...THE SWORD!

WHAT SHALL WE DO?!

I...I CAN'T TELL... WHO'S WHO...

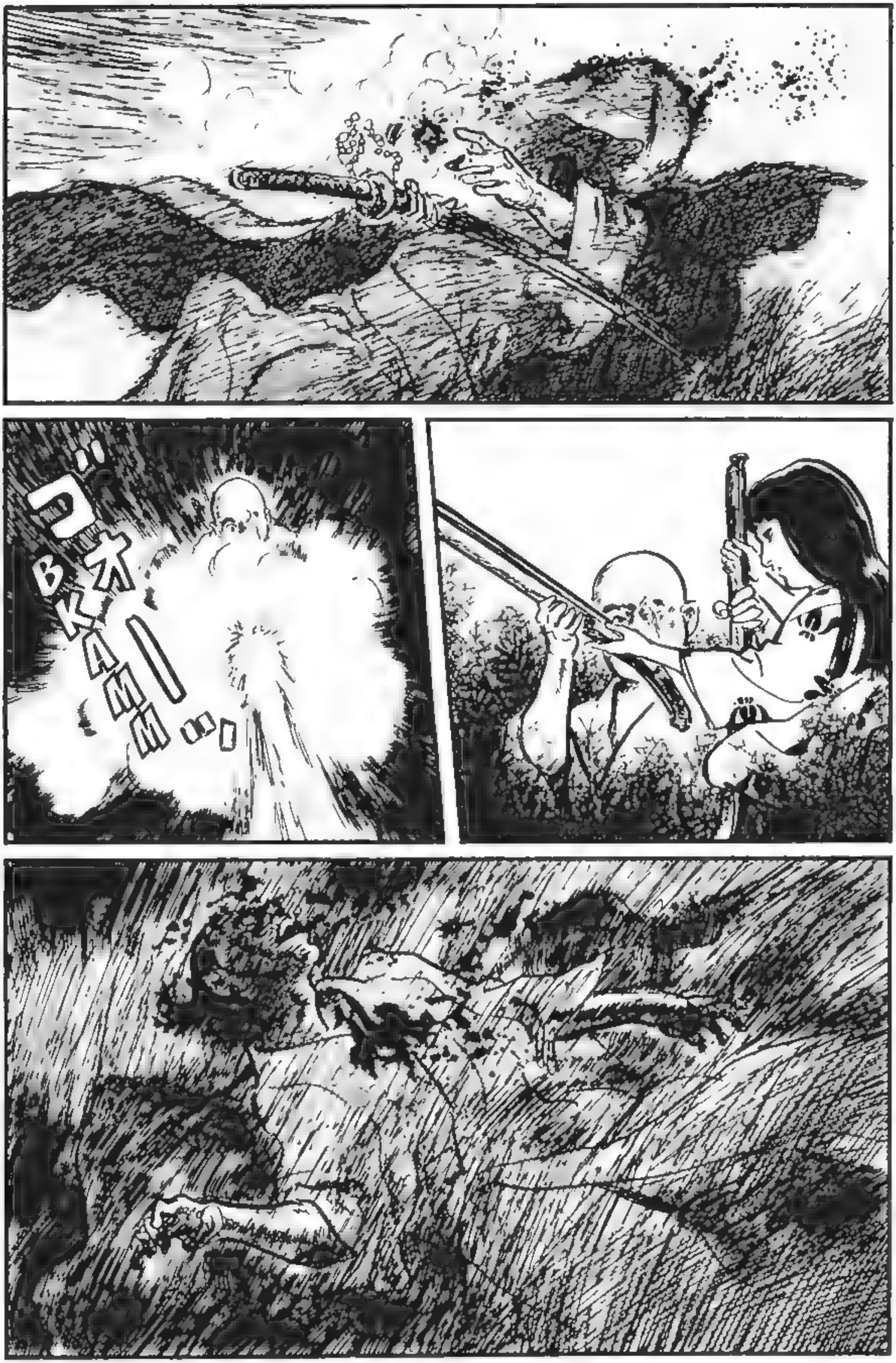
FIND ONE WITH A ROSARY.

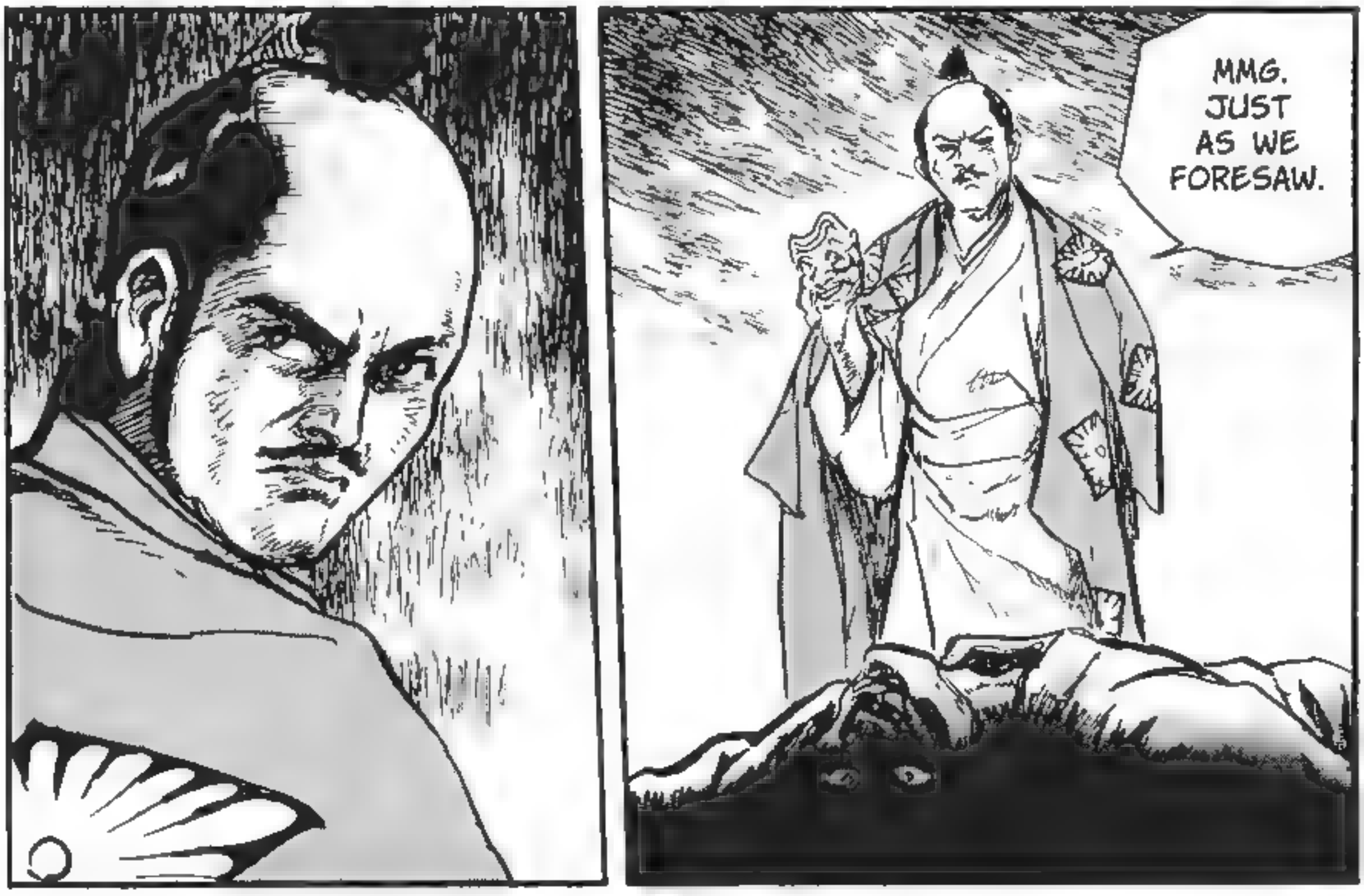
I...I REMEMBER HEARING ABOUT HOW NOBUNAGA WRAPS HIS WITH A SILVER ROSARY EVERY TIME HE GOES TO WAR.

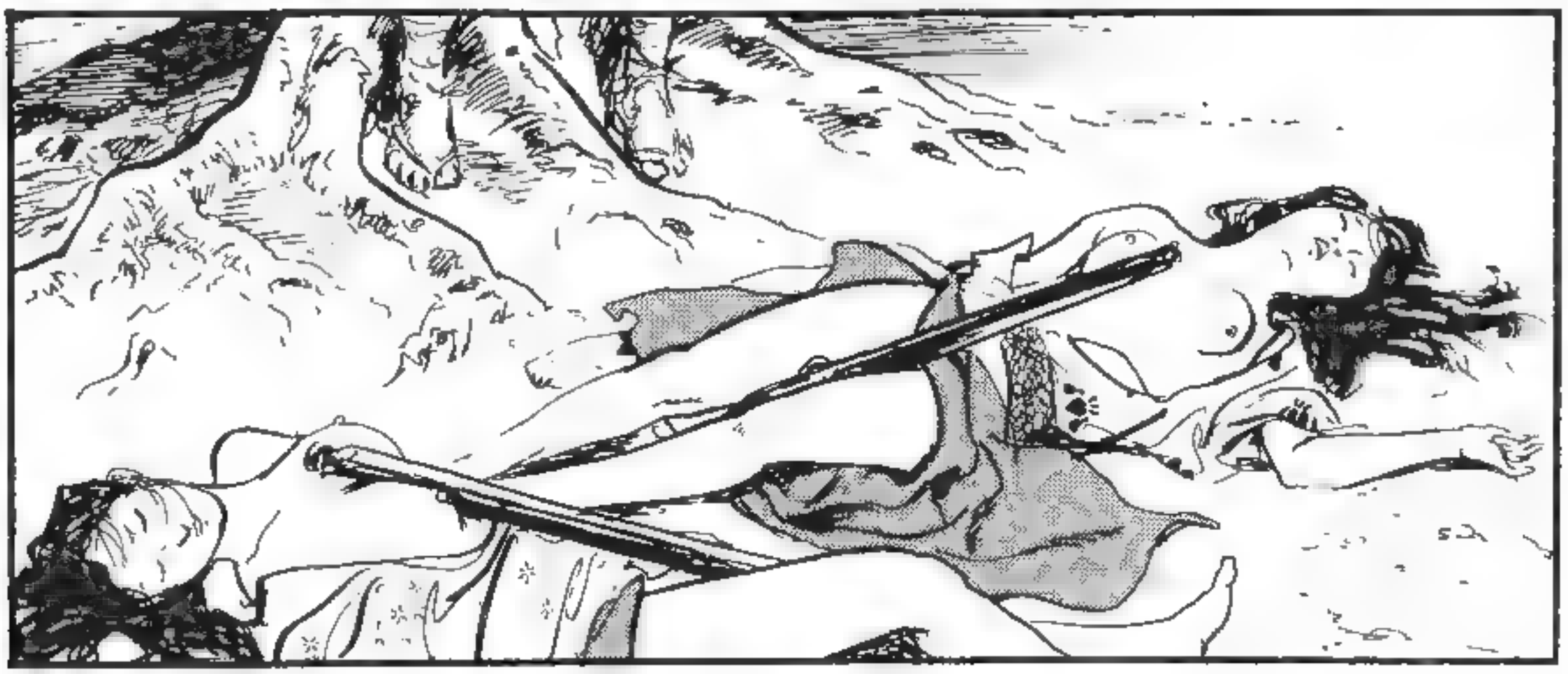
OH. THERE!

HM. YOU SURE HAVE GOOD EYES. INDEED, HIS BLADE HAS A ROSARY ON IT!

BLAM


BRAKK!


MMG. JUST AS WE FORESAW.



URRR.

MY WIFE AND DAUGHTER WERE RAPED...

WE...WE ARE ON OUR WAY TO KYOTO...BUT... BUT LAST NIGHT...THREE MEN...CLAD IN STRANGE CLOTHES... ATTACKED US...

H...HELP US.

JUST NOW...RIGHT AFTER I HEARD GUNSHOTS...THEY CAME BACK...AND LEFT THEIR GUNS...JUST LIKE THAT...AND TOOK OFF LIKE THE WIND...

AND THE MEN?

SHE'S BEEN RAPED.

IT LOOKS LIKE HE ISN'T LYING.

HER TOO.

FOL-LOW THEM!

YES.

UNTIE HIM. AND TRY TO HELP THE WOMEN.

N...NO...THEY ATTACKED US SUDDENLY AS WE WERE PASSING BY.

WERE THEY ALREADY HERE, BEFORE YOU CAME?

THEY COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT. NOT AFTER THEY BOUND YOU.

THEN WHO SHAVED THE BARK OFF THAT TREE THERE?!

YOU MUST BE "DOUBLE BULLETS" ZENJUBŌ!

AND YOU...?

SO IT'S YOU THEN.

HATTORI HANZŌ OF IGA.

SO *HE* IS "DOUBLE BULLETS" ZENJUBŌ!

URRGH!

YOU CAN'T GET AWAY, ZENJUBŌ.

I MAY HAVE FAILED TO KILL NOBUNAGA, BUT I'LL BE SATISFIED WITH TERMINATING HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA. MY NAME WILL BE REMEMBERED AMONG *SUPPA* FOREVER.

HEH HEH HEH. I CAN FINISH YOU, THOUGH.

BESIDES, IT'S ABOUT TIME I LEAVE THIS WORLD ANYWAY. HEH HEH HEH.

WHAT?

ZENJUBŌ, HAVE YOU EVER FIRED AT MOVING TARGETS BEFORE?

I'LL BET YOU'VE ALWAYS HIT FIXED TARGETS.

I CAN DO THAT WITH *KUNAI*.

HEH.

I'VE...I'VE SHOT DOWN DOZENS OF FLYING BIRDS!

BIRDS HAVE NOWHERE TO HIDE IN THE SKY, AND YOU CAN SEE WHERE THEY'RE FLYING TO. THEY'RE THE SAME AS FIXED TARGETS.

KIKKŌ, THROW WATER PIPES.

TOK

TOK

HYU

HYU

IF YOU WANT, I'LL STAND WITH MY BACK TURNED.

ARE YOU GOING TO HAVE YOUR WOMEN SHOOT HANZŌ OF IGA STANDING STILL?

ARE YOU ASKING ME TO DUEL?

FINE!

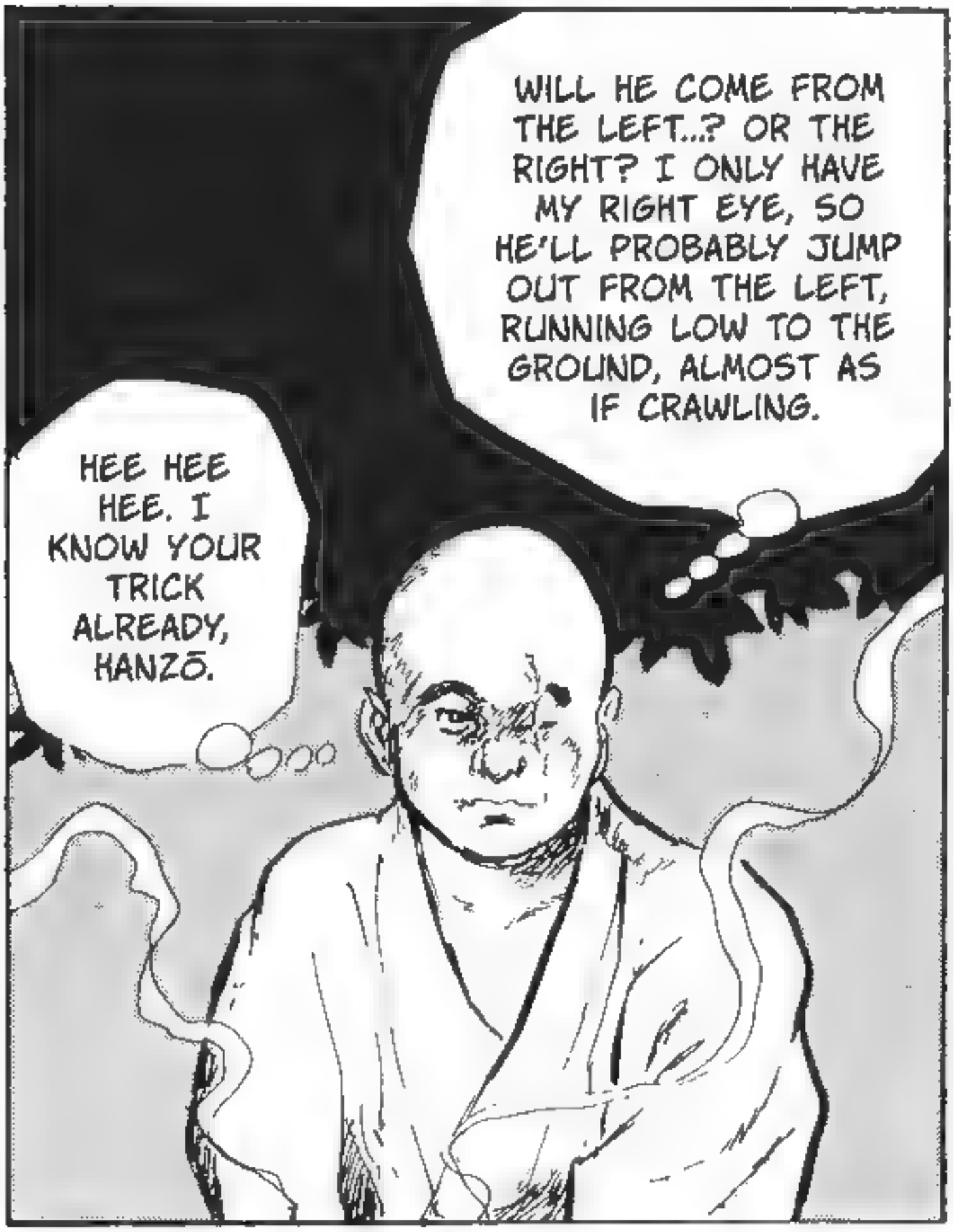
IF YOU DON'T WANT TO BE REMEMBERED AS A COWARD.

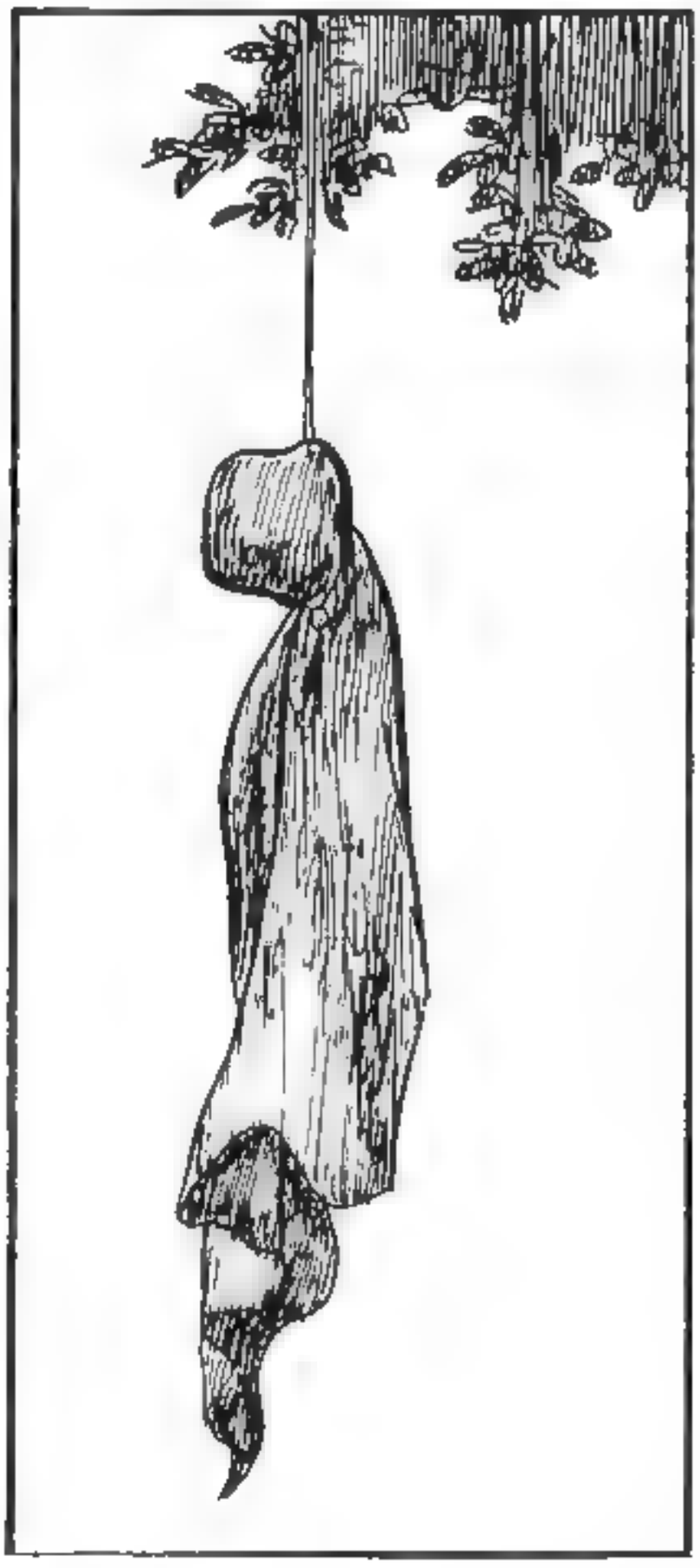
YOU COCKY BASTARD!

I WILL USE ONLY TWO *KUNAI*.

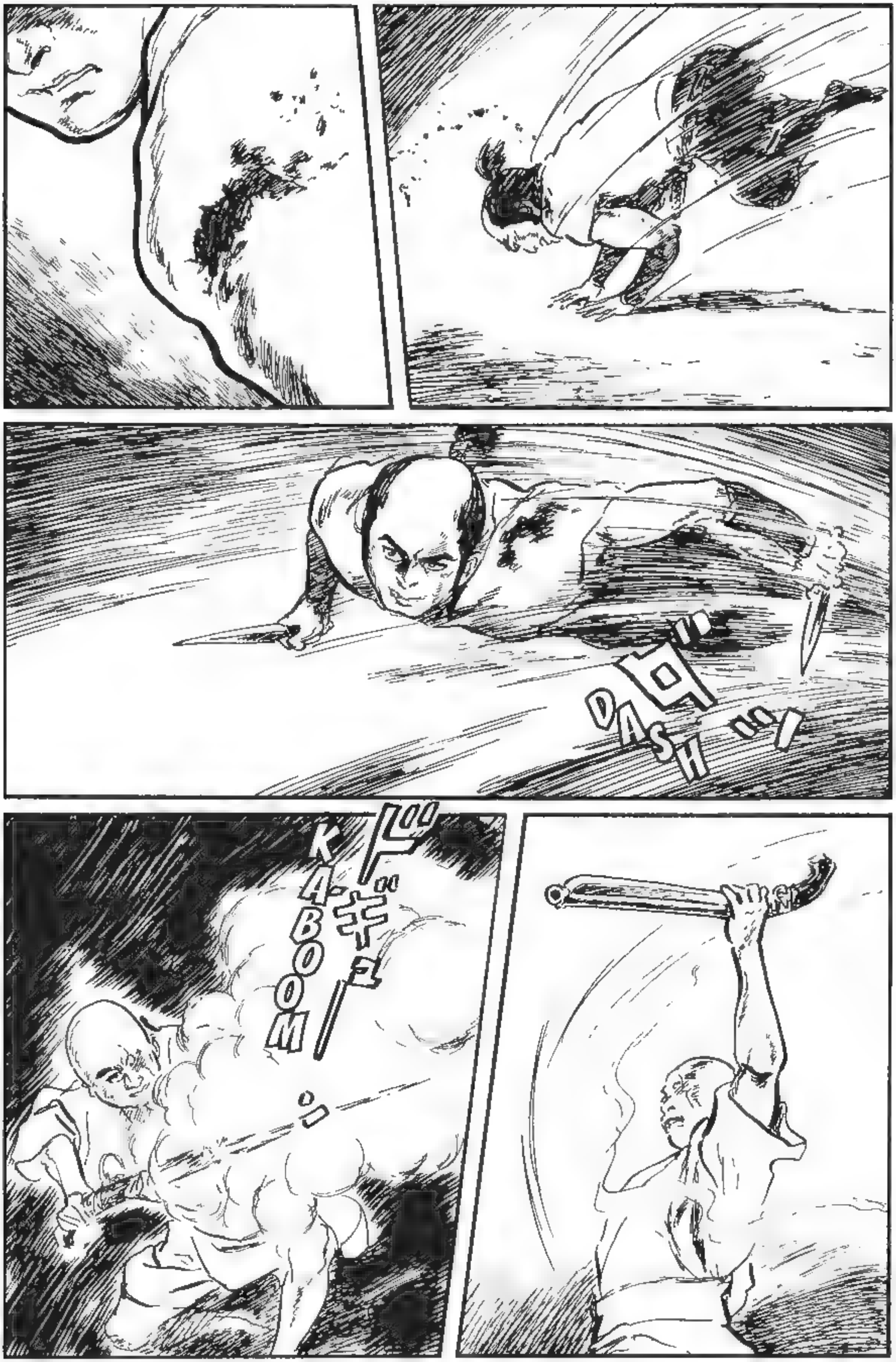
HUH
HUH
HUH
HUH

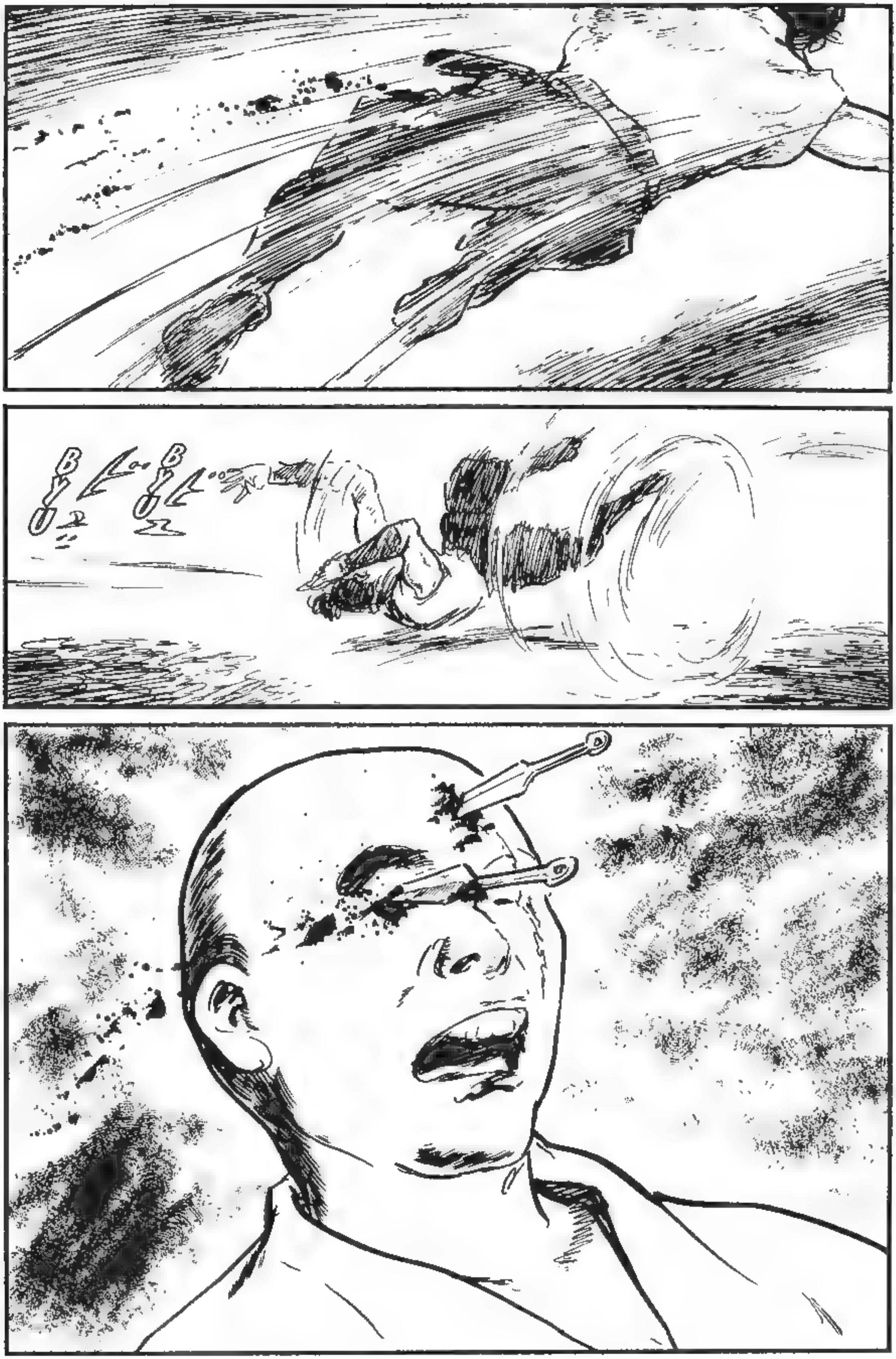
HEE. TRYING TO USE A BODY SWITCH ON ME?! HEE HEE.


WILL HE COME FROM THE LEFT...? OR THE RIGHT? I ONLY HAVE MY RIGHT EYE, SO HE'LL PROBABLY JUMP OUT FROM THE LEFT, RUNNING LOW TO THE GROUND, ALMOST AS IF CRAWLING.
HEE HEE HEE. I KNOW YOUR TRICK ALREADY, HANZŌ.



KA-BOOOM


DASH
KABOOM



HEH
HEH
HEH.

D...DID I
BEAT...
HANZŌ...?

WAAAH!

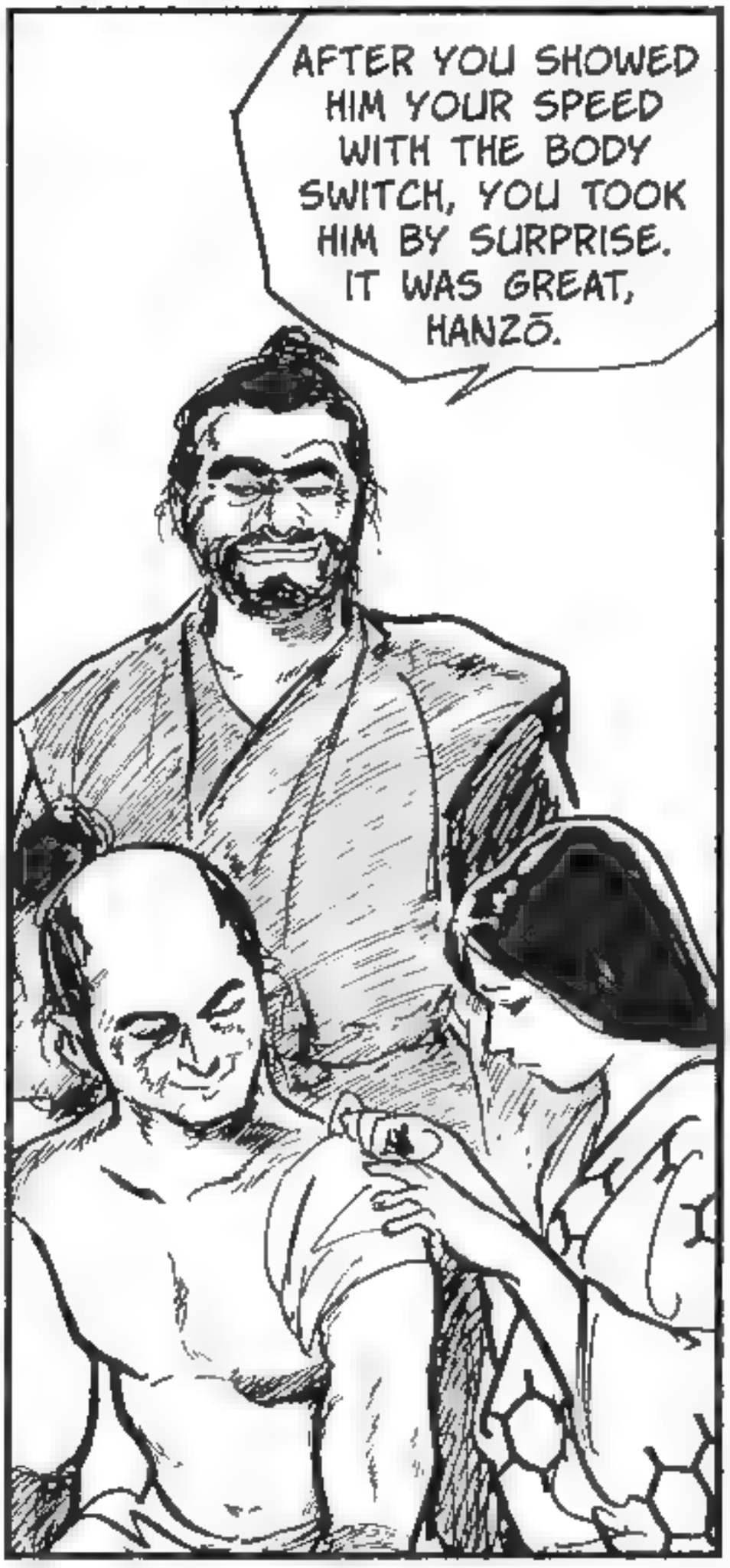
WAHHHH

HEH.
DON'T LIE.
HEH
HEH.

YE...YEAH,
YOU DID!
YOU
WON!

SHRIP!!

WHAT FRIGHT-ENING SKILL.
AND YET ZENJUBŌ STILL MANAGED TO HIT YOU.


AFTER YOU SHOWED HIM YOUR SPEED WITH THE BODY SWITCH, YOU TOOK HIM BY SURPRISE. IT WAS GREAT, HANZŌ.

BLEW
BY
BLEW
BY
POW
POW
POW

THEY...HAD HIDDEN PISTOLS!

IF ZENJUBŌ DIDN'T LAUGH, I WOULD'VE BEEN DEAD.

THAT VICTORIOUS LAUGHTER OF HIS...IT MAKES ME THINK SO.

THOSE WOMEN MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE REASON FOR HIS NICKNAME, "DOUBLE BULLETS."

MAY 21ST, GENKI YEAR ONE (1570 A.D.) NOBUNAGA ELUDED THE DANGER AND RETURNED TO HIS CASTLE IN GIFU.

Chapter On Tenka Fubu No. 5: Ieyasu Gets a Cold

HOFF
HOFF
HOFF

MM.

IT WAS A BIG CASTLE...

IT HAD THREE LAYERS OF MOATS, AND THERE WERE MORE THAN THIRTY GATES.

IN ITS STONE WALLS, EACH ROCK WAS SO HUGE THAT TEN ADULTS HOLDING HANDS COULDN'T HAVE SURROUNDED EVEN ONE.

I WAS LOOKING DOWN FROM THE DONJON, FEELING QUITE PLEASED.

SNRK!

JUST A DREAM.

MILADY WISHES YOUR PRESENCE.

YEAH?

MILORD.

HM.

IT'S JUST A COLD. I'LL GET BETTER SOON ENOUGH.

SHOULDN'T YOU TELL HER, MILORD?

ANYWAY. I DOUBT I'D EVER BE ABLE TO BUILD SUCH A HUGE CASTLE.

BUT IF...

HANZŌ.

IT'S ONLY IF--BUT IF I EVER GET TO LIVE IN A GREAT BIG CASTLE, WHOSE FOUNDATION SPREADS LIKE FAR-REACHING ROOTS...

I THINK I'LL GIVE ONE OF THE GATES YOUR NAME.

SIR.

MI... MILORD!

AND CALL IT HANZŌ-MON.

SNRT

I AM NOT WORTHY OF YOUR WORDS...

IF IT WEREN'T FOR YOU, WHO KNOWS IF I WOULD BE LIVING IN THIS SMALL ONE NOW.

ARRGH, MY FEVER IS GETTING WORSE.

DON'T SPEAK SO FORMAL-LY!

WHAT IF ZENJUBŌ SUCCEEDED IN SHOOTING NOBUNAGA-*DONO*?

SNRRT!

WHAT WOULD I DO?

I HEAR THAT THE *IKKI* INITIATED BY ROKKAKU SHŌTEI IN ICHIHARA-GŌ HAS BEEN CRUSHED BY GENERALS SHIBATA AND SAKUMA.

I BET ROKKAKU WILL JOIN HANDS WITH AZAI. IN ESHŪ, THINGS HAVE CHANGED DRASTICALLY.

NOW EVERY WARLORD UNDER THE SUN IS HOLDING HIS BREATH AND WATCHING WHAT NOBUNAGA-*DONO* WILL DO NEXT.

GREAT WAVES OF WAR WILL SWELL AGAIN AND SPREAD WITH NOBUNAGA-*DONO* AT THE CENTER.

THE SAME WITH SHOGUN YOSHIAKI.

HOW EXHAUSTING. I'D RATHER NOT BE PART OF IT.

I TOO MUST...

I KNOW.

SIR, MILADY WISHES...

THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE ARE A MYSTERIOUS THING, INDEED.

SNRT

YOU AND NOBUNAGA-*DONO*.

NOBUNAGA-*DONO* AND I. YOU AND I.

IF SO, THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS WOULD BE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT. I WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO FEND OFF THE AZAI-ASAKURA UNITED FORCES ON MY OWN. AND YOU WOULD HAVE HAD NO FUTURE. THERE WOULD BE NO HANZŌ-MON.

IF I WASN'T CONNECTED TO NOBUNAGA-*DONO*, YOU WOULDN'T BE EITHER. AND NOBUNAGA-*DONO* WOULD'VE BEEN GUNNED DOWN BY ZENJUBŌ.

WITHOUT YOUR HELP, HE COULD NOT HAVE ATTACKED ASAKURA. IT'S ONLY BECAUSE OF YOUR PRESENCE, MILORD, THAT TAKEDA AND HŌJŌ MUST SIT TIGHT.

IT GOES THE SAME FOR NOBUNAGA-*DONO*.

PEOPLE RECOGNIZE THAT ODA WOULDN'T EXIST WITHOUT TOKUGAWA, NOR TOKUGAWA WITHOUT ODA.

MILORD, YOUR POSITION IS NOW IDENTIFIED AS ODA-TOKUGAWA AND IS FEARED BY EVERY WARLORD UNDER THE SUN.

YOU'RE NOT IN A POSITION TO COMPLAIN ABOUT IT AS SOMETHING EXHAUSTING.

YOU STAND EQUAL TO ODA.

IF YOU ARE NOT COMING, MILADY INSISTS ON VISITING YOU HERE...

MILORD.

LET ME INFECT MY WIFE WITH MY COLD. THE FULL BLAST OF IT. ONCE SHE'S DELIRIOUS WITH A HIGH FEVER, SHE'LL STOP BOTHERING ME WITH HER COMPLAINTS.

IF I THINK OUR NEXT ATTACK ON ASAKURA WILL BE TIRESOME, IT'S LIKE LOSING THE WAR WITHOUT A FIGHT.

HA HA HA HA

THIS IS LIKE ATTACKING ASAKURA.

MOOCH

SMOOCH

SNRRT

Chapter On Hikkyō Jiei

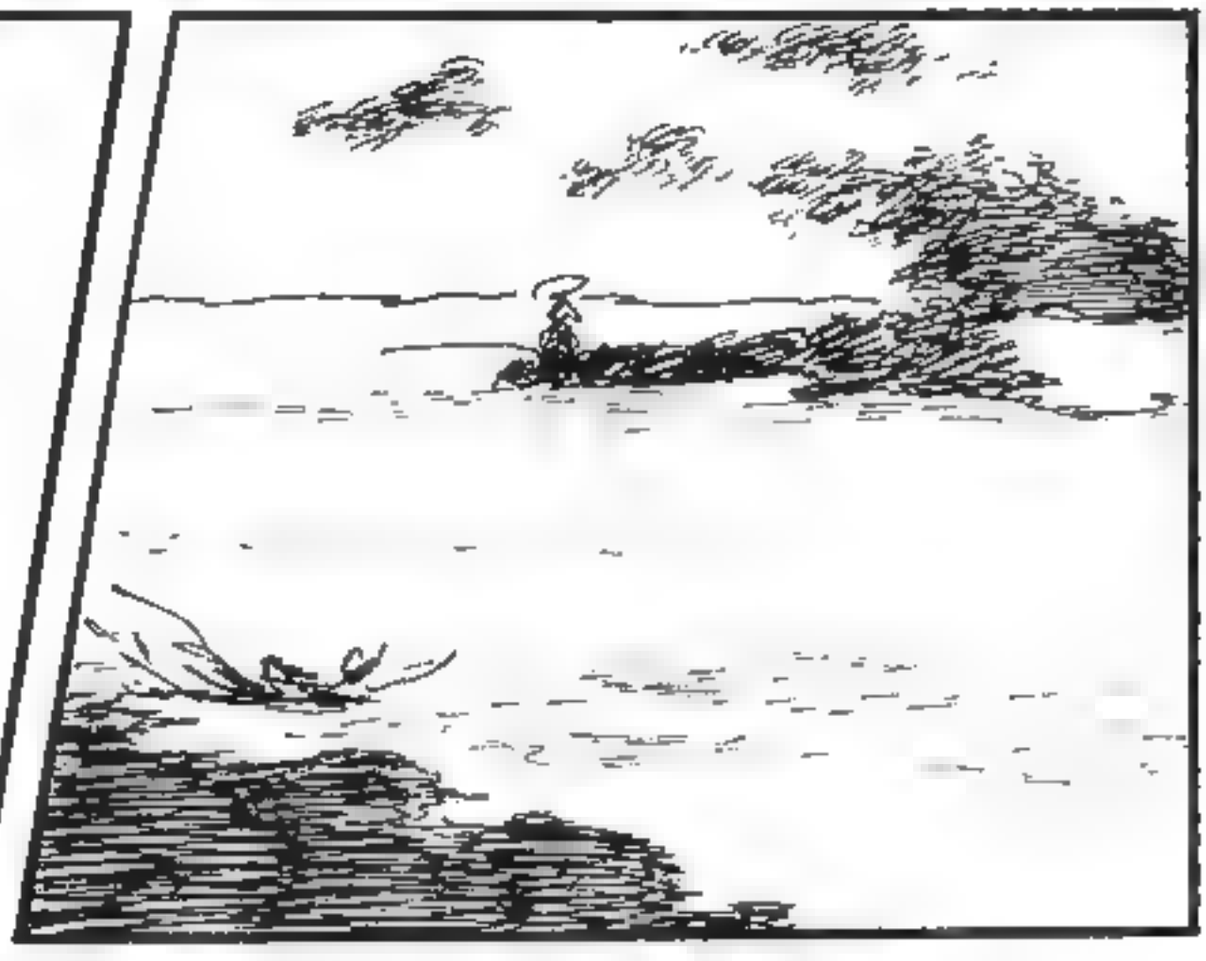
No. 1: Hateful Burden Part 1

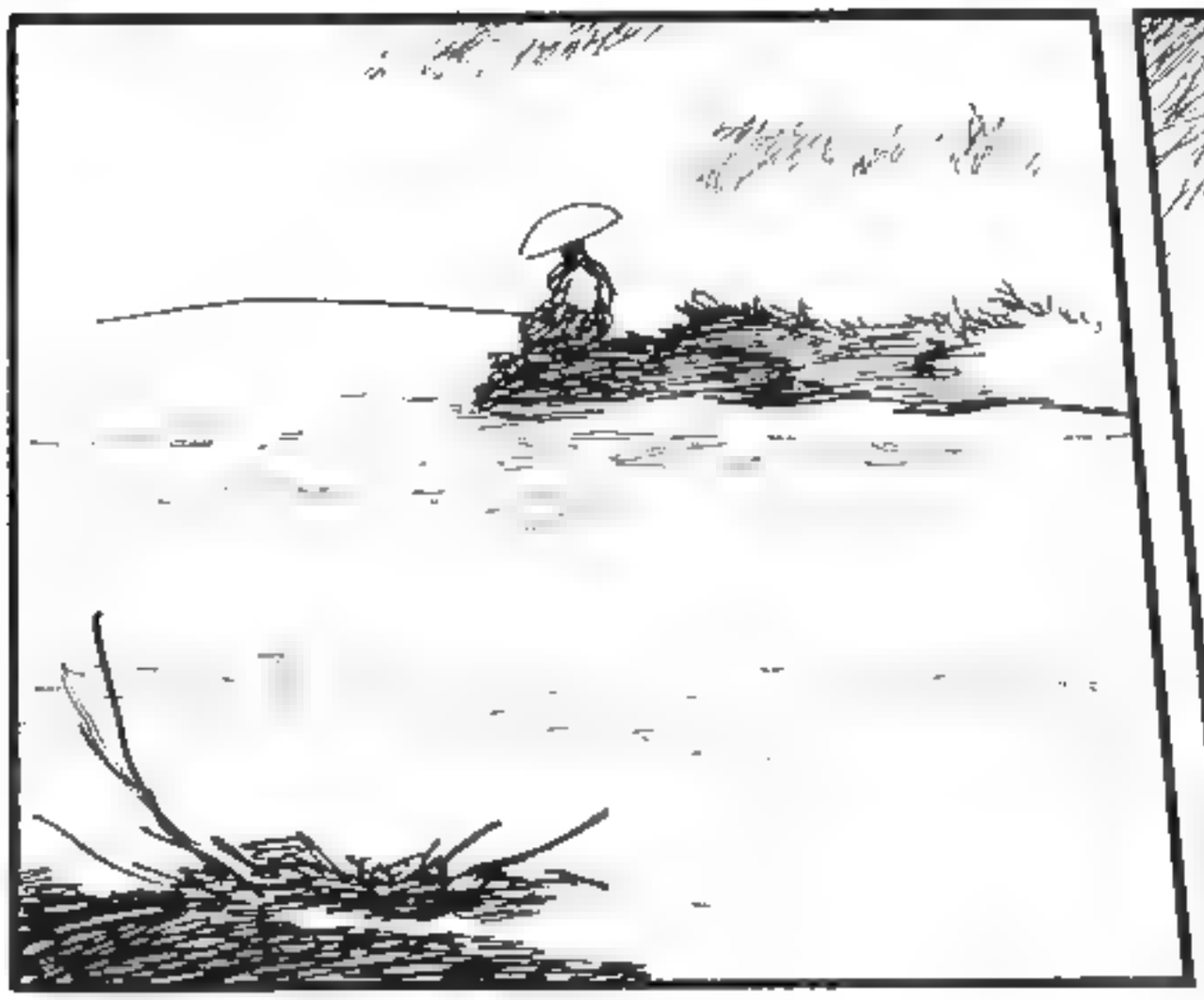
JUNE 19TH,
GENKI YEAR ONE
(1570 A.D.)
NOBUNAGA LEFT GIFU TO
ATTACK AZAI-ASAKURA.
HIS ARMY WAS THIRTY
THOUSAND STRONG.

WE'LL BE ABLE
TO JOIN
IEYASU-SA...
AROUND THE
24TH, I HOPE.

JUNE 21ST. IEYASU LEFT OKAZAKI UPON RECEIVING NOBUNAGA'S REQUEST FOR REINFORCE-MENTS.

HIS ARMY WAS FIVE THOUSAND STRONG.



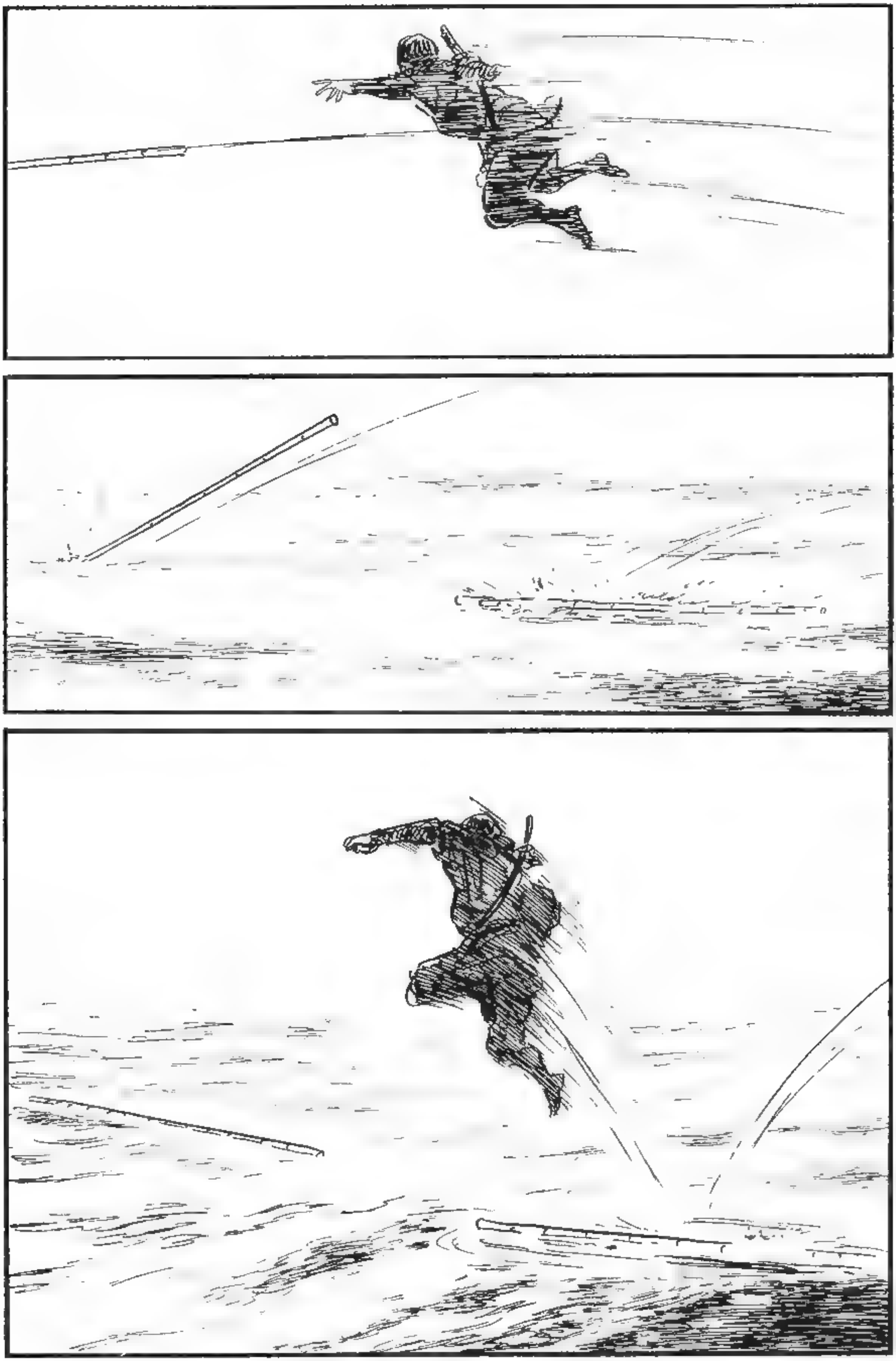


THAT MAN MUST HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY. OTHERWISE, WHY WOULD HE BOTHER TO SEE US OFF, DISGUISED AS A FISHERMAN? HE MUST BE THERE KNOWING WE WOULD QUESTION HIM.

IF I ASK A FISHERMAN HOW HE'S DOING, WHAT WILL HIS RESPONSE BE, I WONDER.

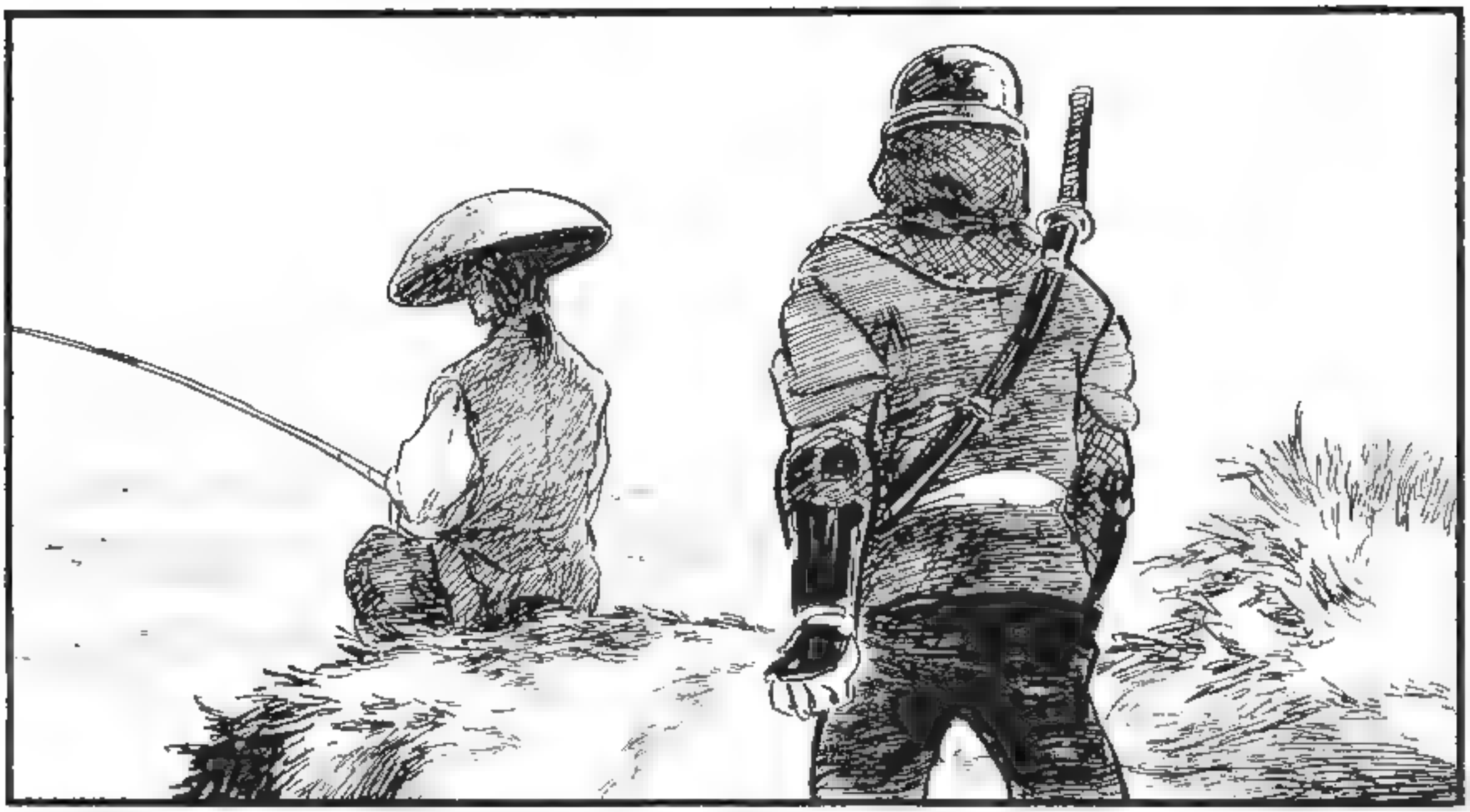
HANZŌ, ASK HIM.

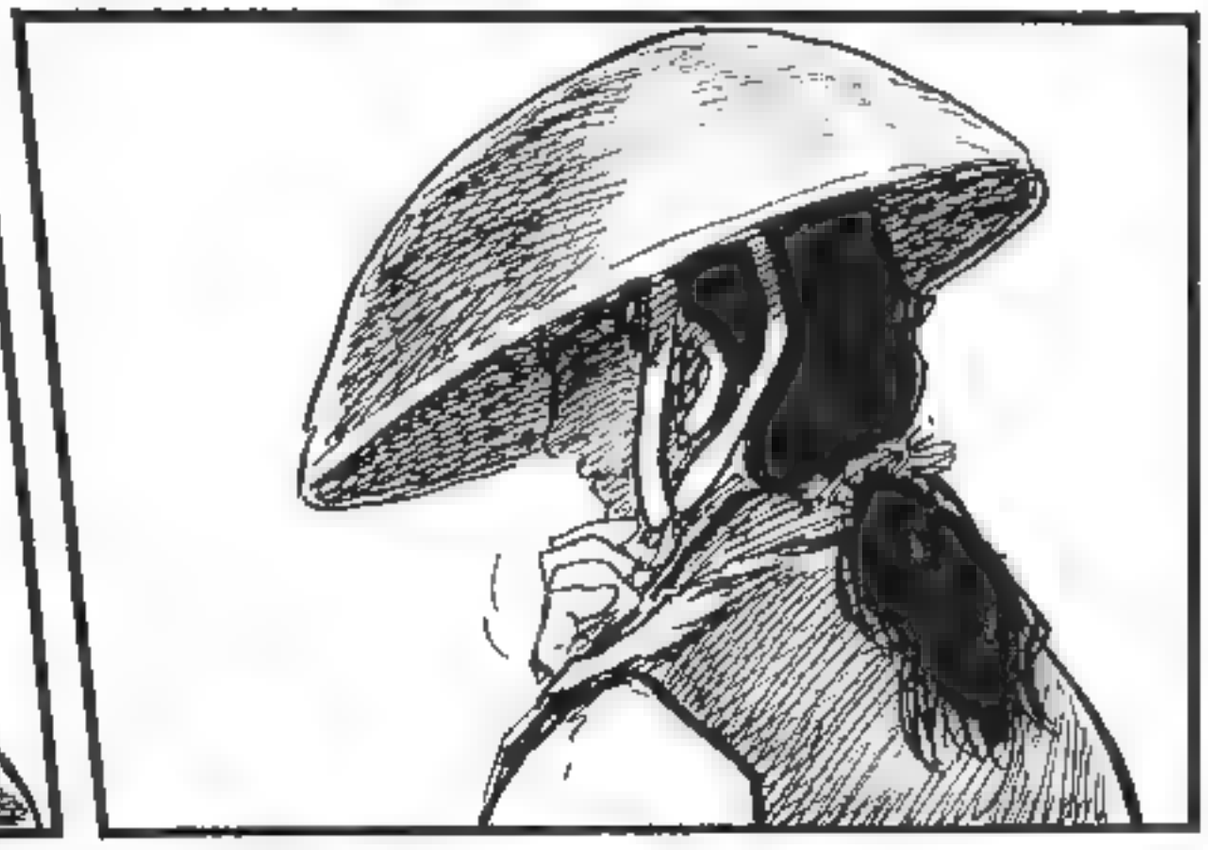
YES SIR!



I TRULY OWE HIM FOR MY SURVIVAL THIS FAR.

HOW SKILLFUL HE IS.





WHEN A MAN SEES A FISHERMAN, HE WILL ALWAYS WONDER HOW THE FISHERMAN IS DOING.

OH, IT'S YOU, TAKENAKA-SAMA!

WHAT ARE THOSE DARKENED MARKS BELOW YOUR EYES?

AND THE FISHERMAN WILL ALWAYS ANSWER.

AND NEVER FAIL TO ASK.

IT HELPS SOFTEN THE LIGHT THAT REFLECTS ON THE SURFACE.

I PAINTED INK. THAT'S ALL.

THIS TIME THE WAR IS LIKELY TO TAKE PLACE WITH A RIVER IN THE MIDDLE.

IS THAT WHAT YOU WANTED TO TELL US?

THE MILITARY STRENGTH OF THE ODA-TOKUGAWA ALLIED FORCES AND THAT OF THE AZAI-ASAKURA UNITED FORCES ARE ABOUT THE SAME.

WITH THE ANEGAWA RIVER IN THE MIDDLE.

I ASSUME IEYASU-*DONO* WILL FACE ASAKURA, WHILE NOBUNAGA-*DONO* WILL FIGHT HEAD-ON WITH AZAI. BUT AZAI IS EXCEPTIONALLY STRONG.

BUT AZAI IS STRONG.

AZAI NAGAMASA IS BOTH A BROTHER-IN-LAW AND A LIABILITY TO NOBUNAGA-*DONO*. THAT'S WHY HE WILL LET IEYASU-*DONO* TAKE CARE OF ASAKURA WHILE HE TRIES TO DEAL WITH AZAI HIMSELF.

HOWEVER, THERE IS NO ENEMY AS STRONG AS THE ONE YOU DON'T WANT TO KILL. THAT'S HOW THINGS ARE. NOBUNAGA-*DONO*'S ARMY WILL FEEL HIS HESITATION AGAINST AZAI NAGAMASA.

NOBUNAGA'S MEN WILL BE PUSHED HARD... THEY'LL BE IN DANGER.

NOT TO MENTION THE RENOWNED VALOR OF THE AZAI WARRIORS, WITH NAGAMASA LEADING THE PACK.

IF HE'S SUCCESS-FUL, AZAI WILL CRUMBLE, AND THE VICTORY WILL BE DECISIVE.

THAT MEANS IEYASU'S ARMY HAS TO DESTROY ASAKURA FAST, AND THEN, TURNING AROUND, HIT AZAI FROM THE SIDE TO HELP NOBUNAGA.

WHEN YOU FIGHT A WAR WITH A RIVER IN THE MIDDLE, THE ONE WHO CROSSES THE RIVER FAST AND STRIKES THE ENEMY ON THE OTHER BANK WILL WIN.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO TO DEFEAT ASAKURA QUICKLY?

IT IS SHEER FOLLY TO FIGHT IN THE RIVER WEARING HEAVY ARMOR, WITH STRAW SANDALS SUCKING UP WATER. THE WINNING ADVANTAGE IS IN DRESSING LIGHT AND BEING BAREFOOT, WHICH WILL ALLOW YOU TO RUN FREELY.

YOU MUST AVOID BEING BLINDED BY THE LIGHT REFLECTED ON THE WATER.

THAT MEANS WHEN CROSSING THE RIVER YOU MUST BE CLAD LIGHTLY.

BUT YOU HAVE TO KNOW THE SIGNIFICANT MEANING HIDDEN BEHIND IT.

IT MAY SOUND TRIFLING.

BECAUSE I THINK IT'S BETTER IF NOBUNAGA GETS PUSHED BACK BY AZAI.

WHY ARE YOU TELLING US THIS...?

MY STRATEGY IS TO PLACE THE RIVER BEHIND THE AZAI ARMY!

AZAI WILL PRESS HARD AND CROSS THE RIVER ALL THE WAY BEFORE ATTACKING NOBUNAGA. THAT'S WHEN IEYASU WILL STRIKE. AZAI MAY PANIC AND TRY TO RETREAT, BUT THE RIVER THEY CROSSED WILL BE IN THE WAY.

THE DEPTH OF THE ANEGAWA RIVER IS THREE FEET. BECAUSE YOU CAN CROSS IT WITHOUT SWIMMING, BATTLES TEND TO BREAK OUT WHILE PEOPLE ARE STILL IN THE WATER, AND THAT MEANS MY STRATEGY WILL WORK.

YES!

DO YOU UNDER-STAND?

IN A WAY, THE VICTOR WILL BE DETERMINED BY HOW THOSE THREE FEET OF WATER ARE USED AS AN ADVANTAGE.

BESIDES, THEY'LL BE LESS CAUTIOUS, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE THEY CAN CROSS IT ON FOOT.

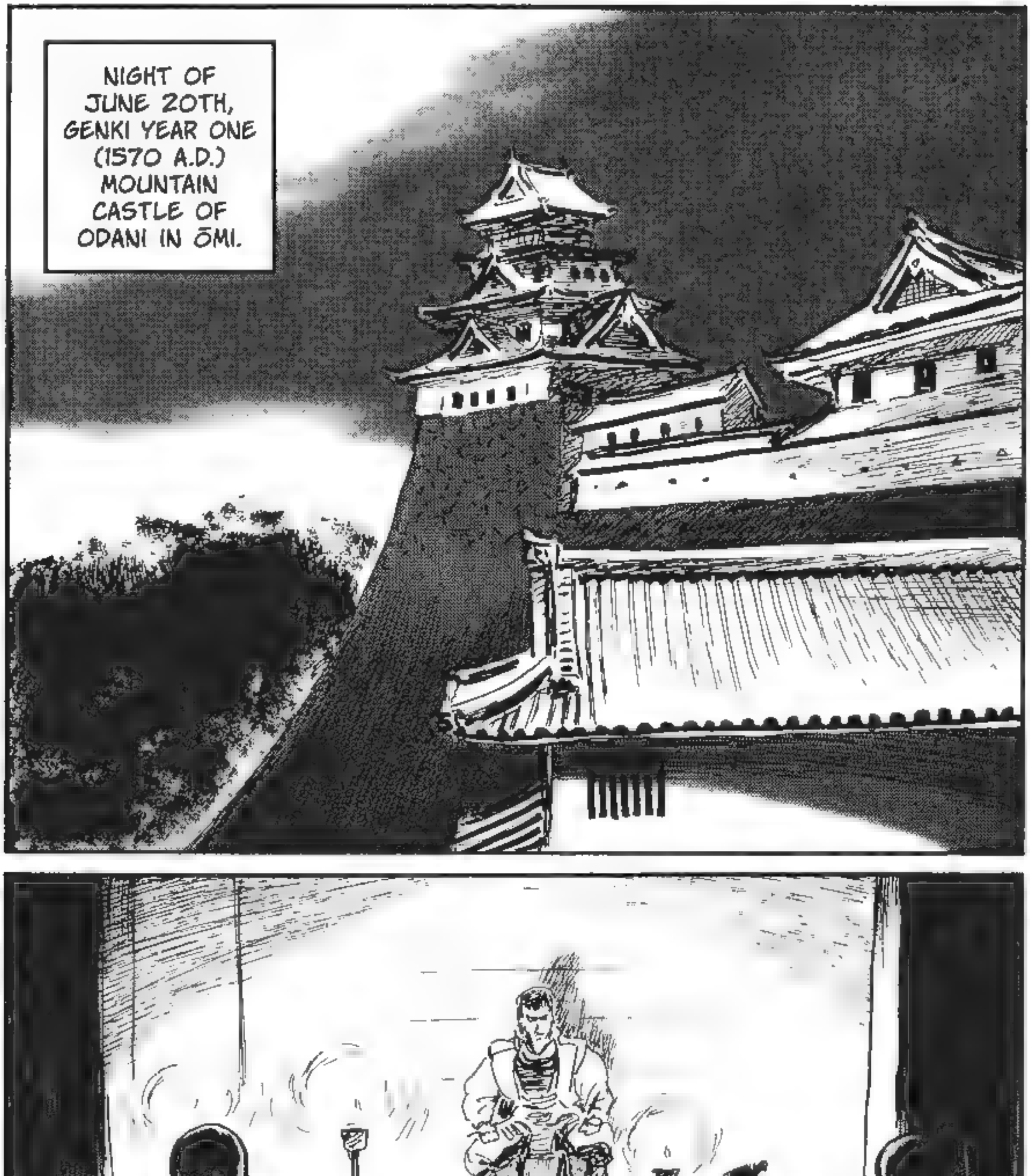
THREE FEET OF RIVER...

BLEHH

I WON'T BE ALIVE MUCH LONGER. THIS IS THE LAST THING I CAN DO FOR HIDEYOSHI-*DONO*.

I AM!

THE FIGHT WILL BE IN THOSE THREE FEET OF RIVER, SO THE OUTCOME HINGES ON HOW YOU USE IT. A THREE FOOT BATTLE. I AM COUNTING ON YOU!


NIGHT OF
JUNE 20TH,
GENKI YEAR ONE
(1570 A.D.)
MOUNTAIN
CASTLE OF
ODANI IN ŌMI.

...OR AZAI-ASAKURA!

NOW THAT IT'S COME TO THIS, LET'S SHOW THE WORLD WHICH IS STRONGER, ODA-TOKUGAWA...

AT LONG LAST, THE TIME HAS COME FOR A DECISIVE BATTLE.

WHAT IS IT?!

I HAVE NEWS, SIR!

STMP STMP STMP

HORI HIDEMASA AND HIGUCHI NAOFUSA, WHO DEFENDED THE FORTS OF TAKEKURABE AND KARIYASU, BETRAYED US AND JOINED FORCES WITH NOBUNAGA...

WE JUST BUILT THOSE FORTS...

H...HOW COULD THAT BE...

WHAAAT!!

PREPARING FOR BATTLE, WE CALLED IN ASAKURA'S HELP AND FINALLY CONSTRUCTED THEM!

RAIN CAN FALL, AND WIND CAN BLOW.

SUNNY SKIES CAN SUDDENLY DARKEN.

I GUESS THESE THINGS HAPPEN.

WE'LL CHANGE OUR PLANS!

HEH HEH HEH. THERE'S NO POINT IN PANICKING.

BESIDES, THE ASAKURA FORCES WILL ARRIVE SOON. AND THIS CASTLE IS IMPREGNABLE. I COULDN'T BREACH IT MYSELF EVEN IF I TRIED.

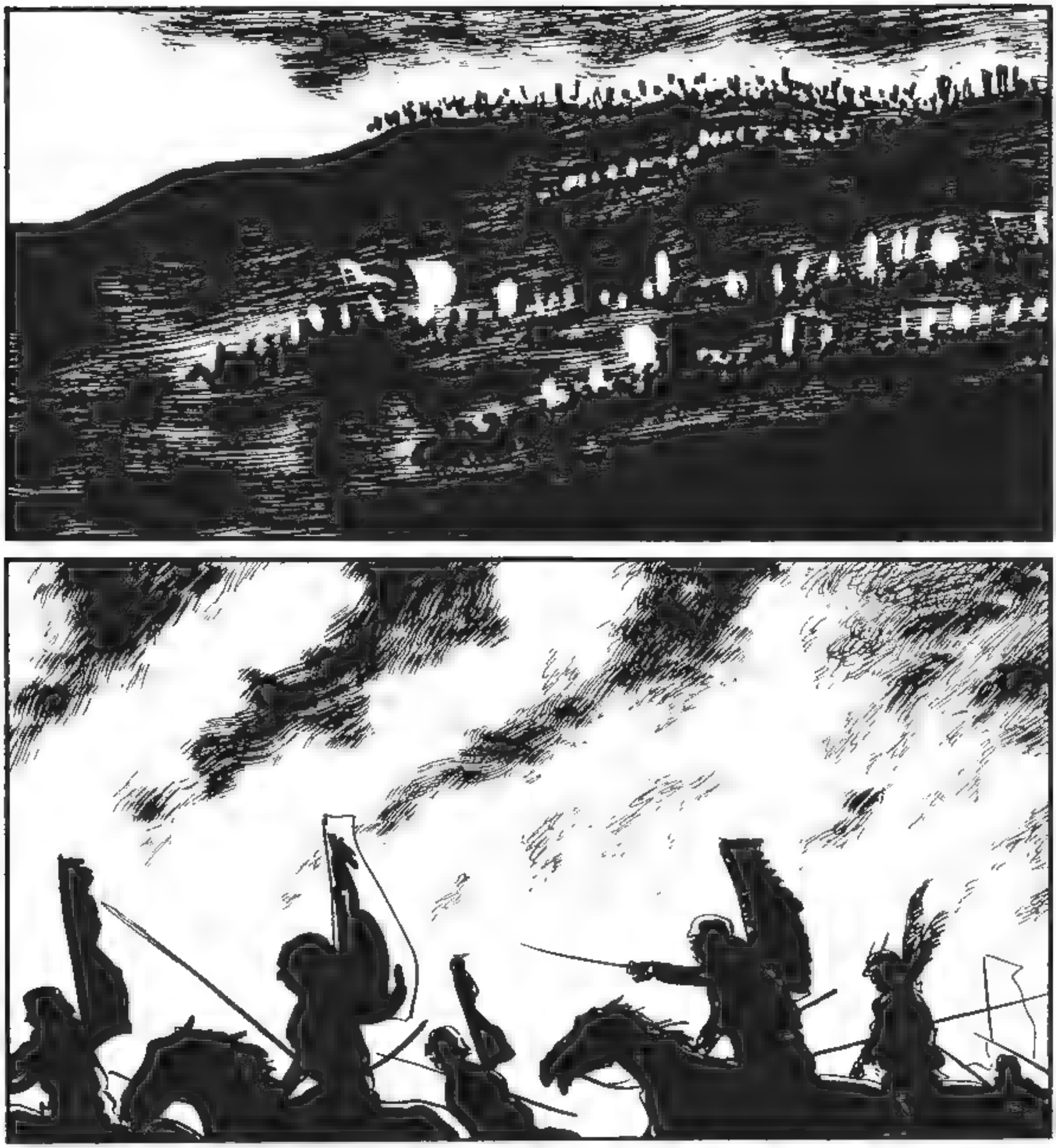
WE'LL HOLD THE CASTLE! WE WON'T STEP OUTSIDE TO FIGHT.

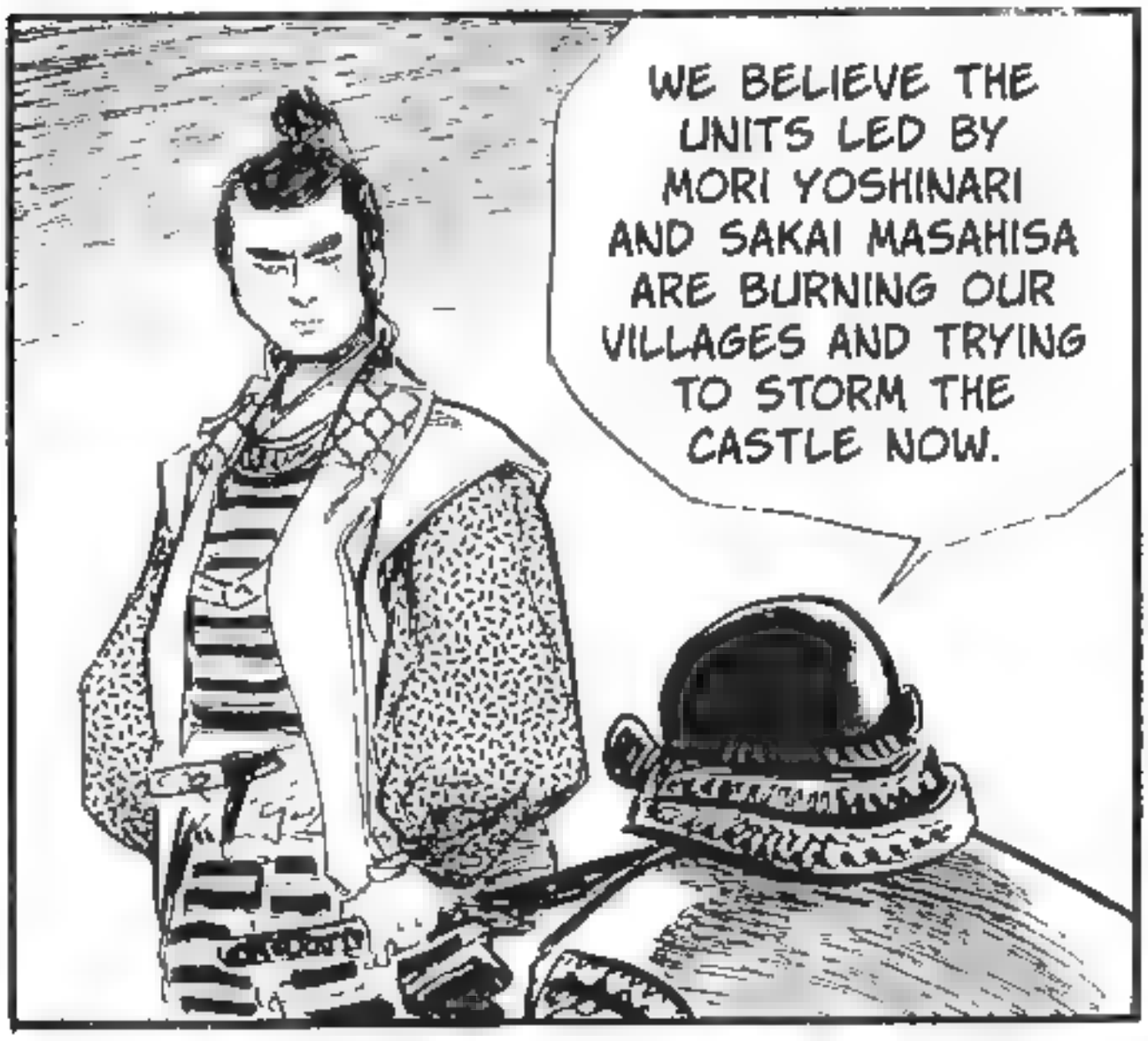
AS THINGS DRAG ON, THE ANTI-NOBUNAGA SENTIMENTS WILL GAIN STRENGTH AND RISE UP.

OUR ENEMY HAS TRAVELED FAR. IF WE SHUT OURSELVES INSIDE, THEY'LL GET NERVOUS AND ANXIOUS, AND THEIR FIGHTING SPIRIT WILL WANE.

YESSIR!

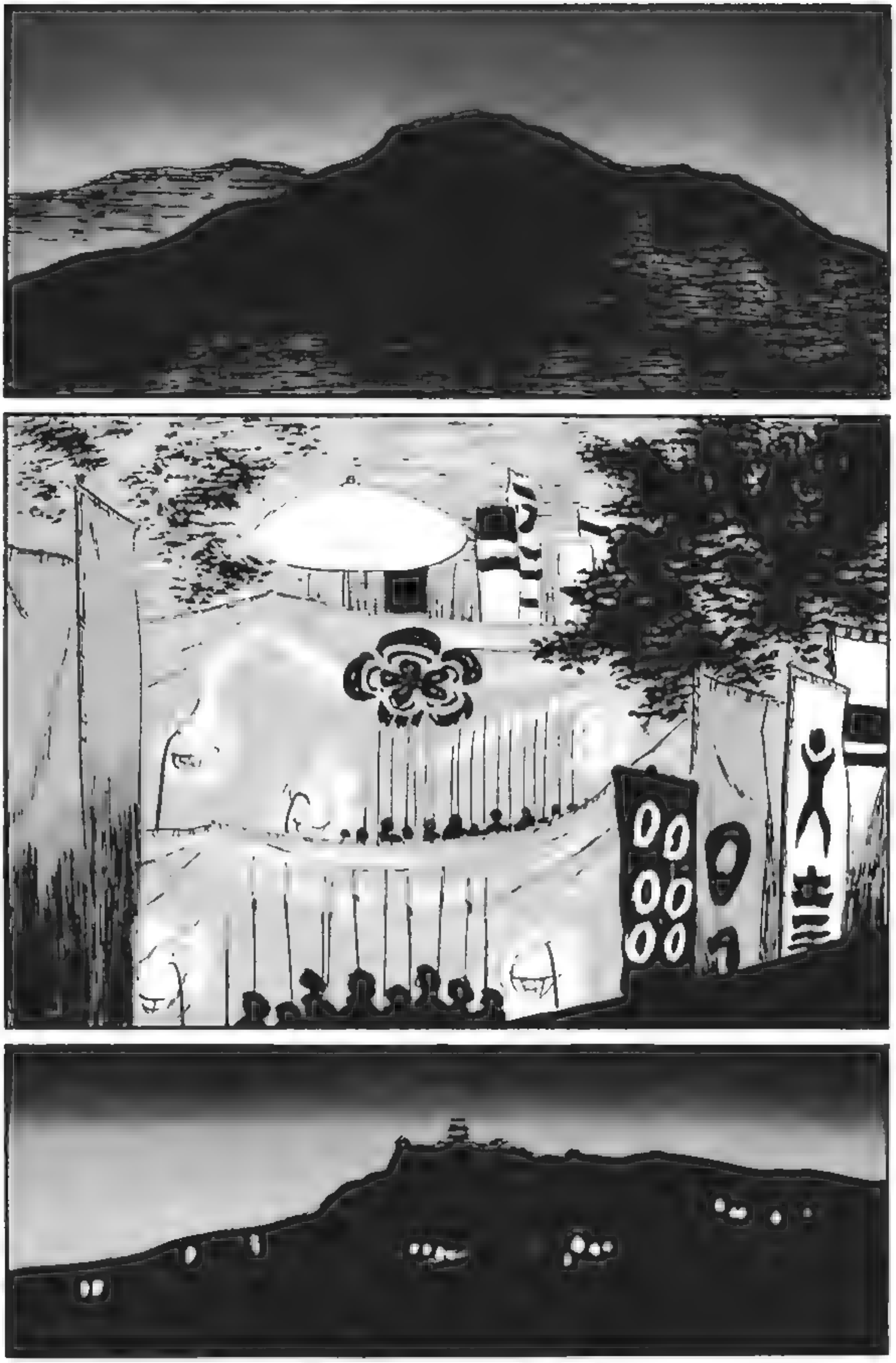
NOW, LISTEN! WE MUST NOT MAKE ANY RASH MOVES!




WE BELIEVE THE UNITS LED BY MORI YOSHINARI AND SAKAI MASAHISA ARE BURNING OUR VILLAGES AND TRYING TO STORM THE CASTLE NOW.

NOBUNAGA HAS HEAD-QUARTERED ON MT. TORAGOZEN.

MT. TORA-GOZEN...



NAGAMASA! HE'S HOLDING TIGHT!

TELL MORI AND SAKAI TO ATTACK THE CASTLE!

KATSUIE! NOBUMORI! TŌKICHIRŌ!

WE'LL DRAG NAGAMASA OUT, WHATEVER IT TAKES!

BURN EVERY VILLAGE AND DESTROY MORE RICE FIELDS!

はっ！

YES SIR!

TRUM ドド

TRUM ドド

TRUM ドド

TRUM ドド

BALDY RAT!! WHAT'RE YOU DOING?!

HMM! IF WE DO, NAGAMASA WILL HAVE TO COME OUT.

I WAS THINKING IT MIGHT BE BETTER TO STRIKE YOKOYAMA CASTLE.

YES SIR!

WE'LL ATTACK YOKOYAMA CASTLE!

GIVE ORDERS TO THE ENTIRE ARMY!

JUNE 22ND.
NOBUNAGA CHANGED COURSE AND STORMED YOKOYAMA CASTLE, LOCATED SOUTHWEST OF THE MOUNTAIN CASTLE OF ODANI.

GOOD.

NOBUNAGA HAS MOVED HIS HEADQUARTERS TO RYŪGAHANA.

WE'LL STRIKE IN FULL FORCE!

WE MUST NOT LET THEM TAKE YOKOYAMA CASTLE!

MOVE OUT!

GOOD! CRUSH THEM!

THE AZAI ARMY IS COMING!

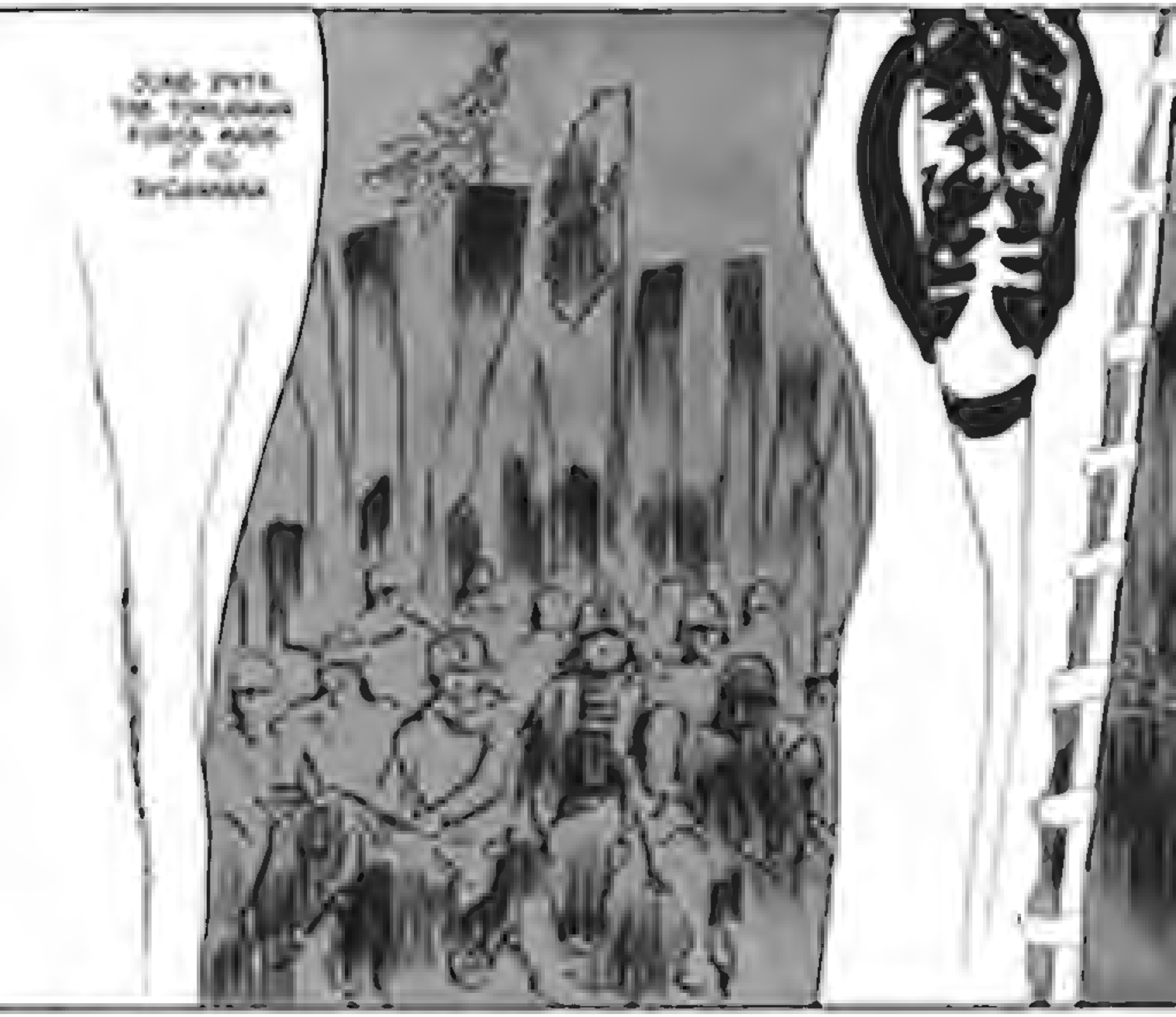
MMMG!

THE ASAKURA ARMY OF TEN THOUSAND MEN IS APPROACHING FROM THE EAST OF MT. ŌYORI.

AT THIS POINT, I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO WAIT FOR IEYASU.

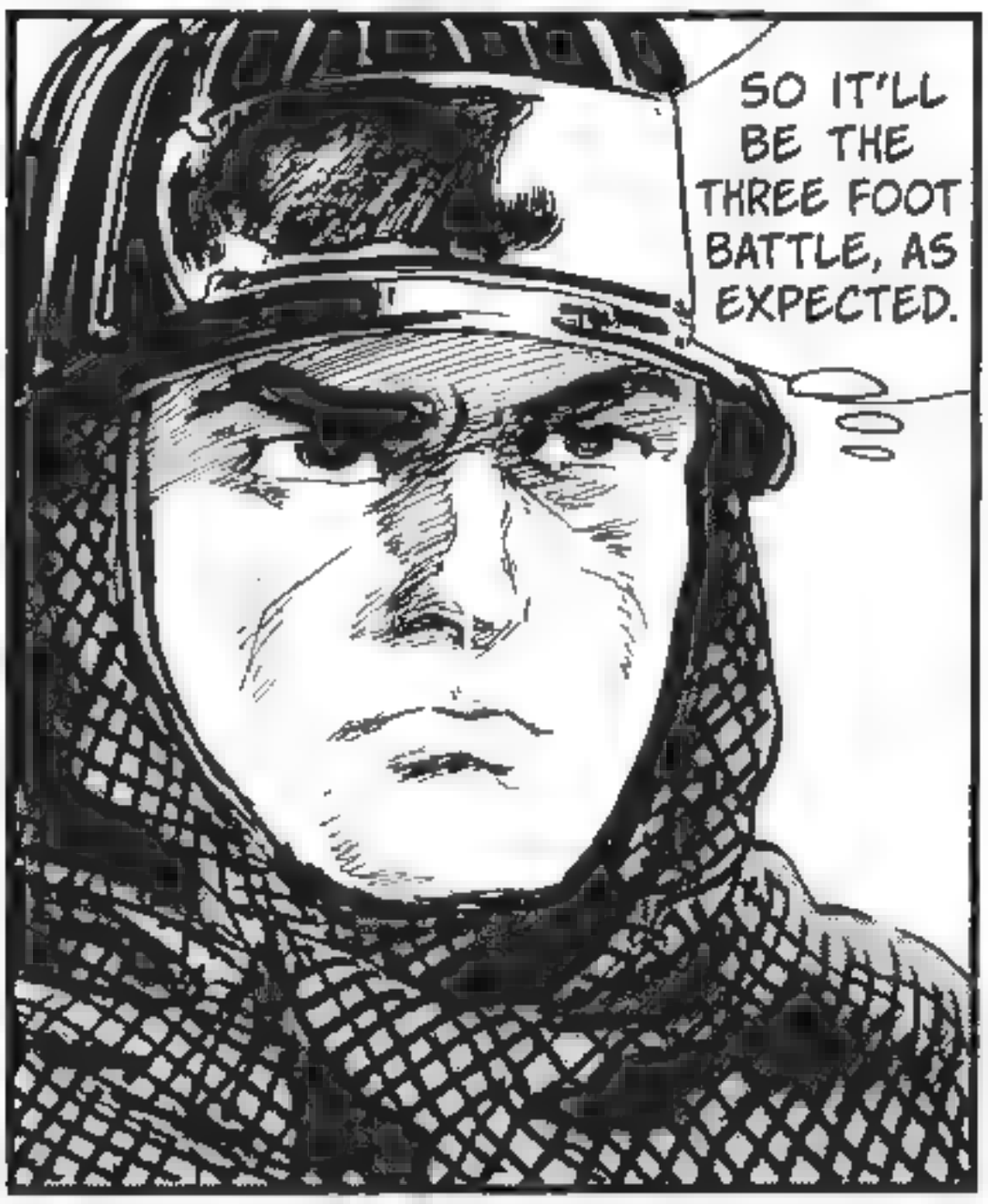
TSK!

PULL BACK OUR SOLDIERS!



AND THE WAR?
YOU'VE COME! COULDN'T WAIT TO SEE YOU.

AZAI IS EIGHT THOUSAND, AND ASAKURA IS TEN THOUSAND!
IT LOOKS LIKE THE ANEGAWA RIVER LIES BETWEEN US FOR THE SHOWDOWN.


SO IT'LL BE THE THREE FOOT BATTLE, AS EXPECTED.

OH. ASAKURA IS BEGINNING TO MOVE FROM MT. ŌYORI.

I BET THEY'LL JOIN THE AZAI FORCE AND ADVANCE CLOSER TO THE ANEGAWA RIVER.

TRUM TRUM TRUM TRUM

TRUM TRUM TRUM TRUM

ASAKURA KAGETAKE MUST BE LEADING THE ARMY. ASAKURA'S MILITARY STRENGTH IS ABOUT TEN THOUSAND MEN.

GU~OO

GOHU GOHU GOHU

THAT FLAG MARK...IT IS NAGAMASA HIMSELF WHO IS LEADING THE AZAI.

GOHU GOHU GOHU GOHU

WHEN YOU FIGHT IN A RIVER, THE ONES WHO AREN'T BLINDED HAVE THE ADVANTAGE. THE SAME APPLIES WITH DRESSING LIGHT. IT STANDS TO REASON.

ONCE THE HAZE CLEARS, THE SUN WILL GLARE.

CLANG

HE COMES UP WITH STRATEGIES THAT CHILL EVEN THE HEARTS OF ALLIES LIKE ME.

HOW INSIGHTFUL TAKENAKA HANBEI IS INDEED. IT WOULD BE SCARY TO HAVE HIM AS OUR ENEMY.

EVERYONE HAS THIS INTIMIDATING LOOK NOW. IT'S LIKE FINDING OGRES IN HELL.

IS THIS GOOD?

HA HA HA

HA HA HA

OH, OF COURSE!

I BET THEY'LL FALTER IF WE PUSH INTO THEM LOOKING LIKE THIS.

THIS IS SUPPOSED TO FRIGHTEN THE ENEMY, TOO!

INABA MICHIASA-*SAMA* FROM ODA HAS COME WITH A THOUSAND MEN TO BRING UP OUR REAR.

I AM INABA MICHIASA. I WAS SENT...TO ACCOMPANY IEYASU-*SAMA*... AND FIGHT ASAKURA...

WHAAAT ?!

PLEASE HAVE YOUR MEN DO THE SAME.

Y... YOUR FACE...

WE'LL PRESS HARD!

THE HAZE IS BREAKING.

MMM. IT'S GOING TO BE SUNNY.

HM. TOKUGAWA IS OPPOSING ASAKURA, WHILE THE ODA FORCE IS FACING AZAI.

THAT'S GOOD. THE BATTLE FORMATION AND ALL. IT'S EXACTLY WHAT I ANTICIPATED.

OLDER BROTHER! I CAN SEE THE TOKUGAWA FORCE CLEARLY. THEY ARE MARCHING OUT RIGHT NOW.

TOKUGAWA AND AZAI ARE THE STRONG ONES. IN THIS WAR, IEYASU-*DONO* HAS TO SHOW NOBUNAGA-*DONO* HOW WELL HE FIGHTS.

I'M SURE EVERYONE IN HIS ARMY IS FULLY AWARE OF THIS DESPERATE GOAL OF HIS. AND THAT MAKES THEM EVEN MORE FORMIDABLE.

HE MUST SHOW THE NATION HOW ODA'S POWER ALONE COULD NOT WIN THIS THREE FOOT BATTLE AND HOW ODA COULD HAVE BEEN IN TROUBLE IF IT WASN'T FOR TOKUGAWA.

NAGAMASA-*DONO'S* BELIEF AS A *SAMURAI* COMPELS HIM TO FIGHT FIERCELY, BECAUSE HE BELIEVES THAT'S THE ONLY WAY NOBUNAGA-*DONO* WILL ACCEPT HIS POSITION.

IT'S NO WONDER AZAI IS STRONG.

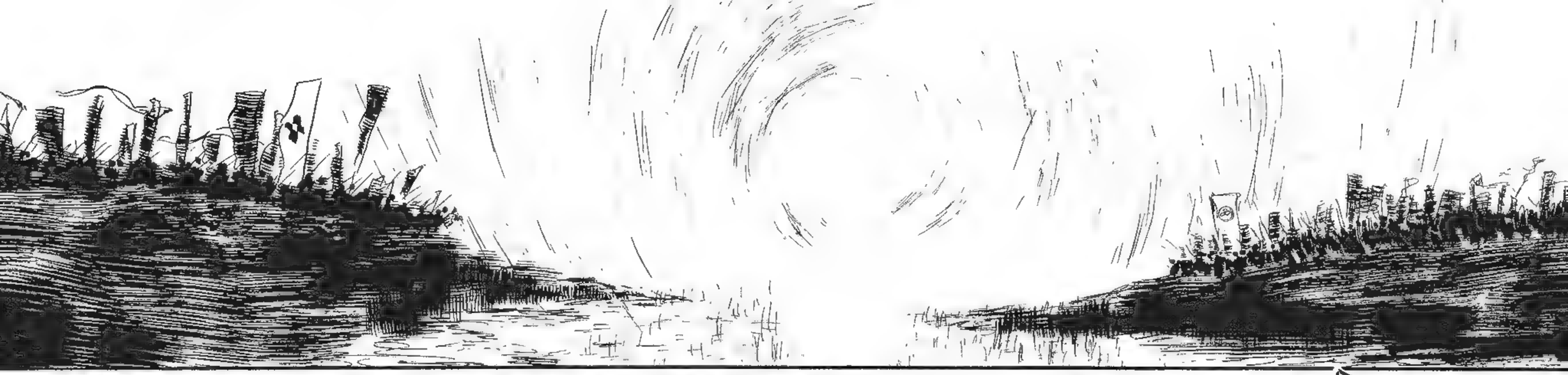
MEANWHILE, UNLIKE ASAKURA, AZAI HAS NO FUTURE UNLESS THEY SETTLE THE MATTER HERE FOR GOOD.

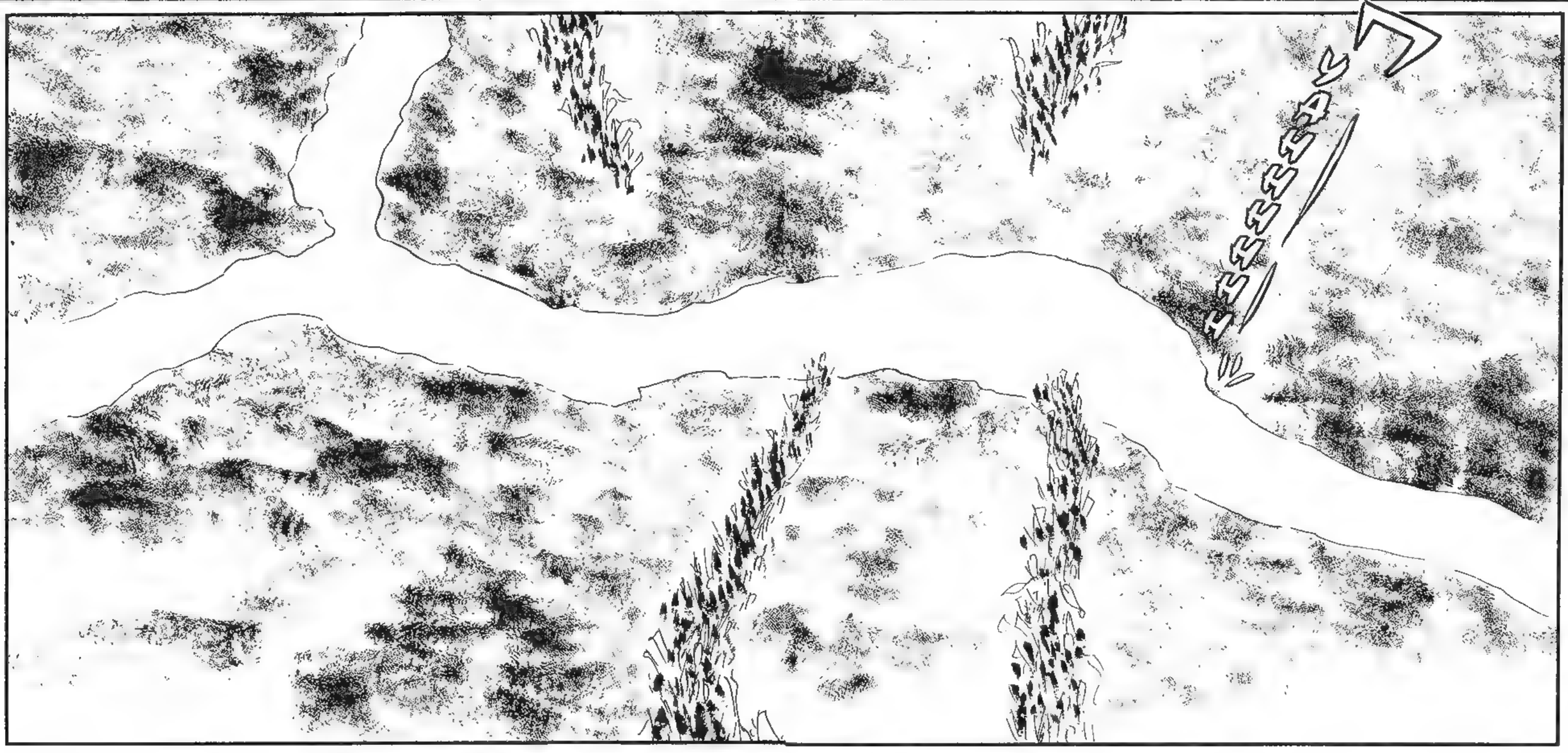
NAGAMASA-*DONO* HAS TO SHOW NOBUNAGA-*DONO*, HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW, THAT HE WON'T GIVE IN.

DU DU DU TRUM TRUM TRUM

BOTH SIDES ARE HEADING TOWARD THE RIVER.

DOOM TRUM DOOM TRUM DOOM TRUM DOOM TRUM




ZZZ

TIME WILL DETERMINE THE OUTCOME. IF IEYASU-*DONO* IS ABLE TO CRUSH ASAKURA QUICKLY...

THEY'RE DESPER-ATE, INDEED.

OLDER BROTHER! IEYASU-*SAMA* AND NAGAMASA-*SAMA* ARE TAKING THE LEAD!

ATTACK! ATTACK! AND ATTACK!

GO! PUSH!

YAHHHH

WE'RE AFTER NOBUNAGA ALONE!

GO! GO!

SHICK
(IN)
AAA
I AM WELL-PROTECTED INDEED.

PUSH HARD!

WE'RE OVERPOWERING THE ENEMY! NOW IS OUR CHANCE TO DRIVE THEM OFF!

IF I WERE AN ASAKURA GENERAL, I'D SEE THE DISADVANTAGE IN FIGHTING THE NIMBLE TOKUGAWA IN THE RIVER AND I'D PULL BACK AND DRAW THE BATTLE ONTO LAND.

TOKUGAWA IS WINNING.

HOWEVER, EVEN IF ASAKURA IS DRIVEN OUT OF WATER, THE COMMANDER OF ASAKURA WILL ORDER HIS MEN TO PUSH BACK IN--BECAUSE OTHERWISE, THEY'LL FEEL LIKE THEY LOST THE WAR.

BY DOING SO, THE FIGHT WOULD TURN INTO A SEESAW GAME AND DRAG ON, WHICH WOULD BE A REAL DISADVANTAGE TO ODA-TOKUGAWA.

AND WHEN ONE SIDE PRESSES HARD AND COMPLETELY CROSSES THE RIVER, THE OTHER SIDE WILL BE PUT TO ROUT IN CONFUSION, THINKING THEY'RE DEFEATED. ASAKURA IS PROBABLY NO EXCEPTION.

JUST AS I'VE PREDICTED.

THAT'S HOW PEOPLE'S MINDS WORK. ESPECIALLY WHEN A BATTLE TAKES PLACE WITH A RIVER IN THE MIDDLE.

THEY'RE FAST! THEY'RE MUCH FASTER THAN I THOUGHT.

AZAI IS HAMMERING HARD, AND THE ODA FORCE IS WAVERING.

GOGO

GOGO

MMG! WE'RE IN TROUBLE! IEYASU-*DONO* MUST HURRY.

THEY'VE BROKEN THROUGH THE SECOND LINE OF ODA'S SIX-LINE FORMATION.

ODA HAD A FRONT LINE HEADED BY SAKAI MASAHISA, A SECOND BY IKEDA NOBUTERU, A THIRD BY KINOSHITA HIDEYOSHI, A FOURTH BY SHIBATA KATSUIE, A FIFTH BY MORI YOSHINARI, AND A SIXTH BY SAKUMA NOBUMORI, EACH LEADING THREE THOUSAND MEN. NOBUNAGA'S MAIN ARMY OF FIVE THOUSAND GAVE THEM A TOTAL OF TWENTY-THREE THOUSAND MEN.

LET ME RECOUNT THE ARRANGEMENTS OF THE FAMOUS BATTLE OF ANEGAWA.

THEIR ENEMY, AZAI, HAD A FORWARD LINE OF FIFTEEN HUNDRED MEN HEADED BY ISONO KAZUMASA, A SECOND BY AZAI MASAZUMI, A THIRD BY ATSUJI SADAYUKI, A FOURTH BY SHINJŌ NAOYORI, EACH OF THE LAST THREE CONSISTING OF ONE THOUSAND MEN.

NAGAMASA'S MAIN FORCE OF THIRTY-FIVE HUNDRED TROOPS GAVE THEM A TOTAL OF EIGHT THOUSAND.

AS FOR TOKUGAWA, THEY HAD A FORWARD GROUP HEADED BY SAKAI TADATSUGU, A SECOND BY OGASAWARA NAGATADA, AND A THIRD BY ISHIKAWA KAZUMASA, EACH CONSISTING OF ONE THOUSAND TROOPS. IEYASU'S MAIN ARMY OF TWO THOUSAND GAVE THEM A TOTAL OF FIVE THOUSAND MEN.

IN ADDITION, ODA SENT A THOUSAND MEN WITH INABA MICHIASA TO BRING UP TOKUGAWA'S REAR.

THEIR ENEMY, ASAKURA, HAD A FRONT UNIT HEADED BY ASAKURA KAGETOSHI, A SECOND BY MAENAMI SHINPACHIRŌ, BOTH CONSISTING OF THREE THOUSAND TROOPS. ASAKURA KAGETAKE'S MAIN FORCE OF FOUR THOUSAND GAVE THEM A TOTAL OF TEN THOUSAND MEN.

YAHHHHH

HOWEVER, ON THE TOKUGAWA SIDE, IEYASU CUT THROUGH HIS OPPOSITION, WHILE ON THE AZAI SIDE, NAGAMASA BROKE THROUGH. THEY BOTH DEFIED DEATH AS IF THEY WERE STRIKING THE HEAVENS THEMSELVES.

THE WAR UNFOLDED EXACTLY AS TAKENAKA HANBEI PREDICTED.

AZAI NAGAMASA IS HERE! I WISH TO HAVE AN AUDIENCE WITH NOBUNAGA-*DONO!*

HE'S A GOOD FIGHTER INDEED!

NAGAMASA IS COMING!

OH, ASAKURA IS NOW PUT TO ROUTE!

IEYASU-*DONO* SEIZED HIS VICTORY!

INABA-*DONO*! HURRY!

DO NOT CHASE THEM! WE'LL TURN AROUND AND HIT AZAI IN THE BELLY!

"DO" "ZA" "ZA" "ZA" "ZA"

DO NOT FALTER! YOU FOOL!

MILORD! PLEASE RETREAT FOR NOW! AZAI TROOPS HAVE BROKEN THROUGH OUR SIXTH LINE!

NOBUNAGA-*DONO*! I SHALL TAKE YOUR HEAD!

NAGA-MASA!

THIS IS WHERE NAGAMASA DIES! COME! I'M WAITING!

TOK... TOKUGAWA IS COMING!

ドザ ザ ザ ザ ザ

DO ZA ZA ZA ZA ZA

BACK... PULL BACK!!

THEY'RE TOO FRAIL!

ASAKURA... HOW CAN THEY BE SO... FEEBLE?!

TAKECHIYO IS SO FAST! HE DROVE ASAKURA AWAY ALREADY!

WE WON!

YES.

WE WON!

WE...

IF THEY CUT OFF OUR RETREAT WE'LL BE ANNIHILATED!
BACK! PULL BACK!

HE'S MAKING A DESPERATE EFFORT TO ESCAPE.

NAGAMASA IS JUST AS QUICK TO WITHDRAW. I ADMIRE THAT.

IT IS THE RECKLESS COURAGE OF A DOG TO THINK OF HURRYING DEATH JUST TO PAINT A PRETTY PICTURE OF BRAVERY TO BE REMEMBERED BY.

EVERYONE, WATCH HIM. WHENEVER AND WHEREVER HE IS, A GENERAL MUST SURVIVE, WHATEVER THE COST, AND LIE IN WAIT FOR HIS NEXT OPPORTUNITY.

MM.

TOKUGAWA IS ATTACKING THE ROUTED ENEMY!

HA HA HA HA

FLEE! FLEE, NAGAMASA!

GO!

IF WE FAIL TO KILL HIM, WE'LL HAVE TO LEAVE OKAZAKI AGAIN AND FIGHT ANOTHER WAR!

CHASE WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT! WE MUST SNATCH NAGAMASA'S HEAD AT ALL COST.

CHASE!

THEY MUST BE EXHAUSTED, MEN AND HORSES ALIKE. THEY'VE ALREADY DONE THEIR DUTY. IT WOULD'VE BEEN NATURAL FOR THEM TO WRAP UP AND COME BACK, WITH AFFECTED AIRS. BUT INSTEAD....

THEY MUST BE TIRED. THEY FOUGHT ASAKURA WITH A DESPERATE EFFORT THAT DESTROYED THEIR OPPONENT, AND THEN THEY WENT ON TO HIT AZAI FROM THE SIDE.

THAT MAN IEYASU, HE IS DIFFERENT. HE MEANS TO RUN DOWN NAGAMASA NO MATTER WHAT IT TAKES.

UNLESS HE IS KILLED, THE FIRE OF *TENKA FUBU* WILL SPREAD AND SPARK EVEN A BIGGER WAR.

MILITARY SCIENCE TEACHES US NOT TO CHASE TOO FAR. BUT WITHOUT DOING THAT, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO WIN NAGAMASA'S HEAD.

IEYASU IS HOT ON NAGAMASA'S TAIL, INTENT ON STAMPING OUT THE FIRE HERE AND NOW. HOW IMPRESSIVE.

INDEED, HE HAS THE ABILITY TO RULE THE NATION.

WHEN HE FIGHTS, HE DOESN'T KEEP HIS EYES ONLY ON TODAY. HE FIGHTS WITH ALL HIS MIGHT EVEN AS HE EYES THE FUTURE.

THE KINOSHITA ARMY HAS REORGANIZED AND IS NOW CHASING NAGAMASA-*DONO*.

WE, ODA, ARE THE ONES FIGHTING NAGAMASA-*DONO*!

GO! DON'T LAG BEHIND IEYASU-*DONO*!

GET THEM! DON'T LET HIM GET AWAY!

IF WE FAIL TO KILL HIM OURSELVES, IT WILL BE OUR DISGRACE TO BE REMEMBERED FOREVER. NOT ONLY THAT, IT WILL BRING ABOUT A BIGGER WAR!

BALDY RAT ALSO FIGHTS EYEING THE FUTURE.

DO NOT FALL BEHIND IEYASU OR TŌKICHIRŌ! EVERYONE, CHASE NAGAMASA AND SWARM RIGHT INTO ODANI!

IF WE DON'T, IT'S GOING TO BE TROUBLESOME DOWN THE ROAD.

SET FIRE ON THE CASTLE TOWN OF ODANI AND BURN IT DOWN, AND SEIZE NAGAMASA'S HEAD!

LET'S GO!!

ONCE NAGAMASA-*DONO* ESCAPES TO THE MOUNTAIN CASTLE OF ODANI...THIS FIRE WILL BECOME A BIGGER WAR ONCE AGAIN.

WE SHOULD'VE KEPT A RESERVE FORCE OF A THOUSAND, READY AND AWAITING ORDERS.

ONE MORE UNIT...

IT'S GOING TO TURN INTO A HUGE CONFLICT. AS FAR AS THIS BATTLE OF ANEGAWA IS CONCERNED, ODA-TOKUGAWA CAME VERY CLOSE TO WINNING, BUT SO LONG AS AZAI NAGAMASA LIVES, THERE IS NO DEFINITIVE VICTOR HERE.

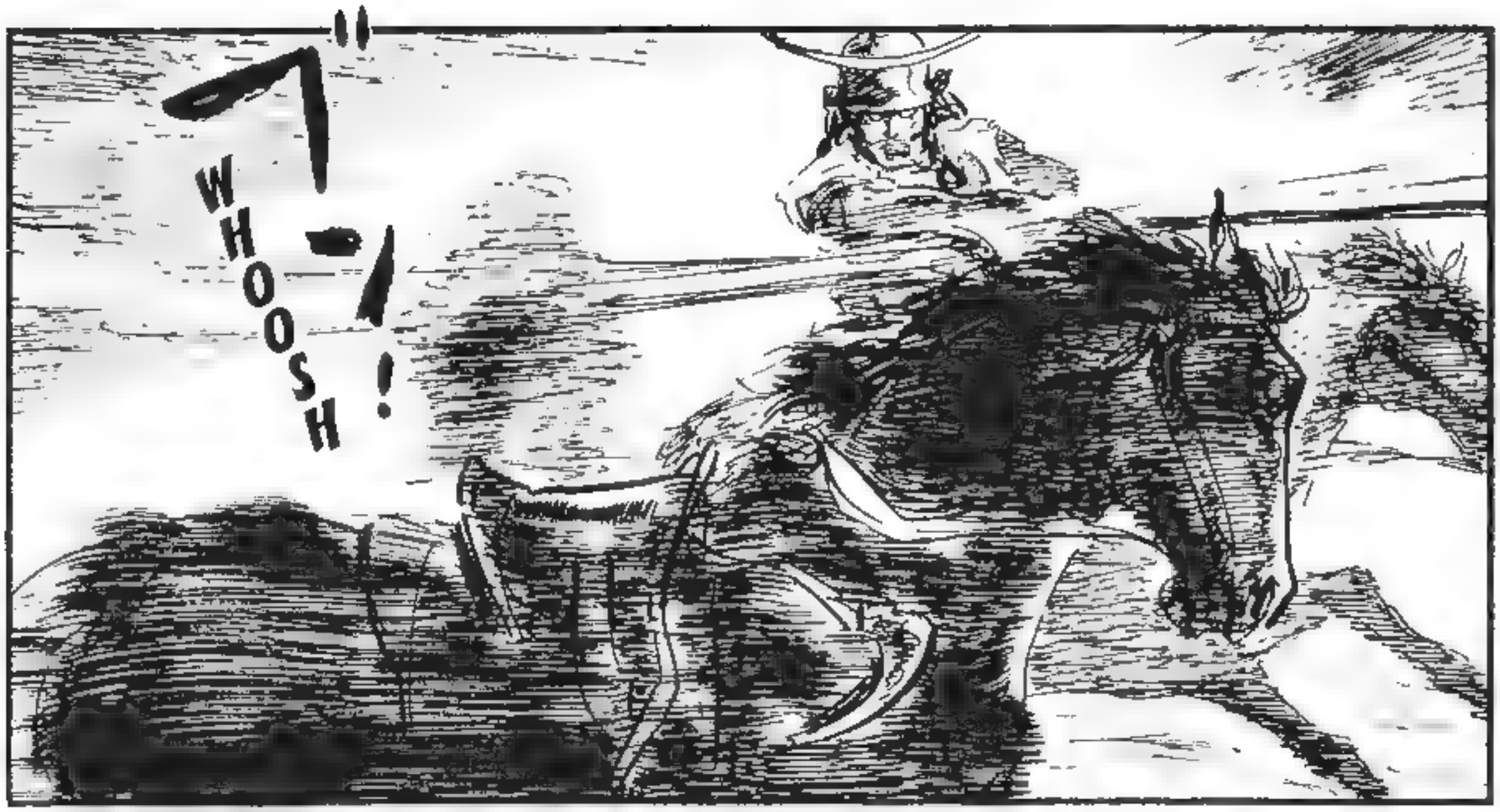
AZAI AND ASAKURA WILL HAVE STRONGER TIES THAN EVER BEFORE, AND BECOME CLOSER TO ASHIKAGA YOSHIAKI. IN ADDITION, THEY WILL JOIN FORCES WITH THE MIYOSHI FACTION, ISHIYAMA HONGAJI TEMPLE, AND TAKEDA SHINGEN, AND LINE UP TO BESIEGE THE ODA-TOKUGAWA ALLIED FORCES.

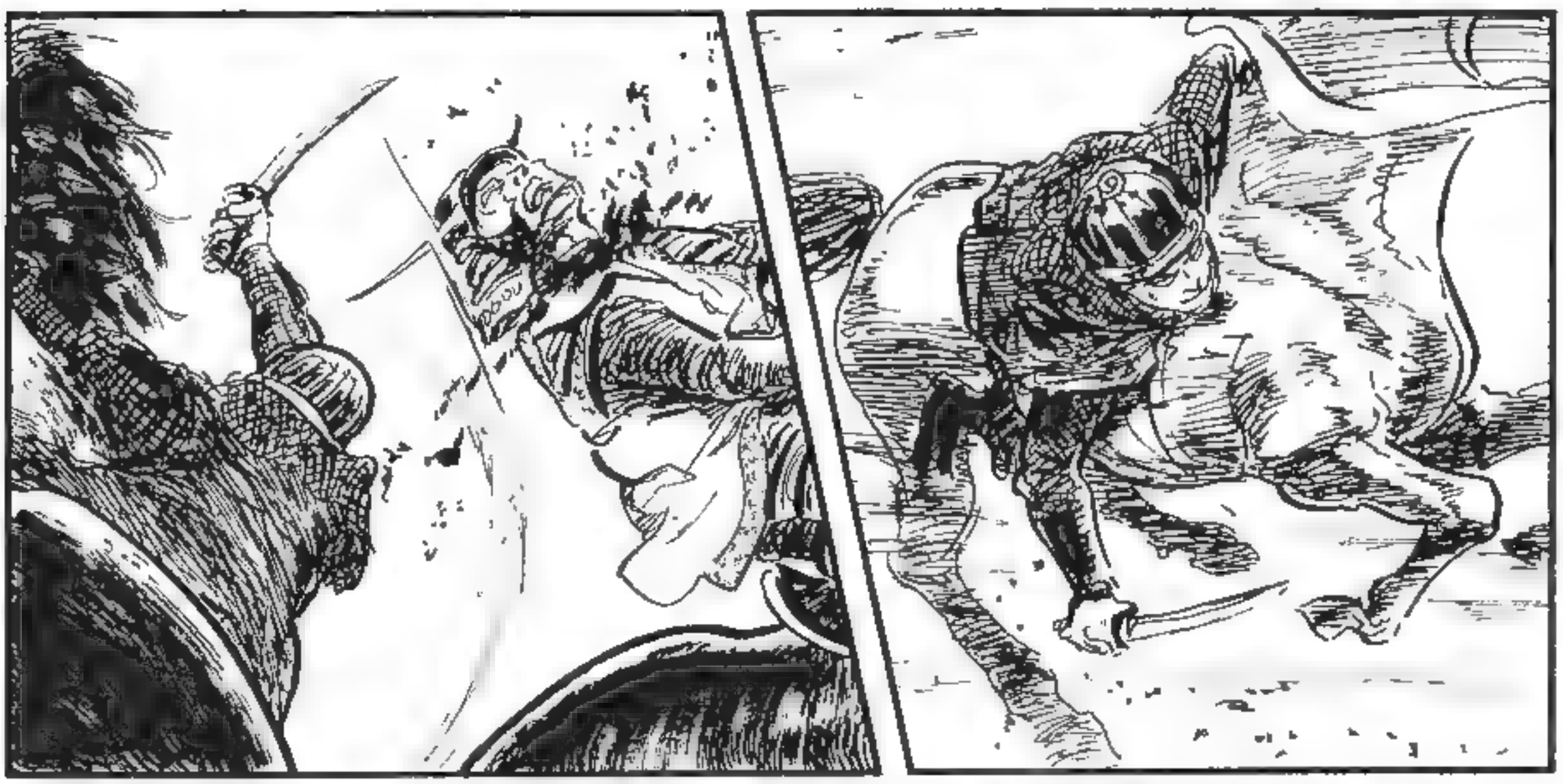
I AM ENDŌ KIEMON, A VASSAL OF AZAI NAGAMASA!

...FIGHT ME!

I WILL NOT LET ANYONE GO ANY FURTHER. IF YOU DON'T HOLD YOUR LIFE PRECIOUS...

YOU!
I AM
HATTORI
HANZŌ
MASANARI!


WHOOSH!



THOMP

LIFE IS GOING TO BE ROUGH NOW...

MMG. WE WON'T BE ABLE TO CATCH NAGAMASA.

REDIRECTING HIS COURSE, NOBUNAGA WON THE SURRENDER OF YOKOYAMA CASTLE--AND LEAVING KINOSHITA TŌKICHIRŌ IN CHARGE, HE HEADED FOR SAWAYAMA NEXT.

NOBUNAGA CAME WITHIN FIFTY *CHŌ* OF ODANI AND SET FIRE TO THE CASTLE TOWN, BUT IN THE END, HE FAILED TO KILL NAGAMASA.

THE ODA-TOKUGAWA ALLIED FORCES CHASED AND KILLED MORE THAN ELEVEN HUNDRED AZAI-ASAKURA SOLDIERS.

BIDDING NOBUNAGA FAREWELL AND PROMISING TO MEET AGAIN IN TIMES OF NEED, IEYASU HEADED BACK TO OKAZAKI.

Chapter On Hikkyō Jici No. 1: Hateful Burden Part 1

OKAZAKI

OH... SURE.

BITE MY NIPPLE... WILL YOU...?

PINCH THIS ONE WITH YOUR FINGER... WILL YOU?

UUU...

SOMEHOW... YOU STOP... JUST A LITTLE TOO SOON...

IT'S...IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE WE MADE LOVE...

UU... UUU...

URM...

A LITTLE TOO SOON...

AH AH AHH.

DAR-
LING!

YOU
TAKE TOO
LONG...

I CAN'T KEEP
UP. I'M TIRED.
IT'S BEEN MORE
THAN AN HOUR
ALREADY.

IT JUST
GOES ON
FOREVER.

I ATTACK
YOU FROM
BEHIND, GET
ON TOP OF
YOU, UNDER
YOU...

I CRAWL
MY TONGUE
THROUGH
YOUR BUSH...

THEY SAY THAT GAINING WEIGHT DULLS THE SENSES...
IT'S YOUR FAULT I GOT CHUBBY.

JUST... A LITTLE LONGER...
HMM. I GUESS I CAN'T DENY IT.

HAAA

HAAA

HAAA...

A LITTLE MORE... URR...JUST A LITTLE...

NO, WAIT!

I'M JUST ABOUT... FINISHED.

N...NOT YET?! URRK...

AH...

JUST A LITTLE MORE. AHH, JUST A LITTLE.

I...
CAN'T...

AHHH

AAAH

AAAH

AAAH

I'M GOING TO HAND OVER THIS CASTLE TO NOBUYASU AND MOVE TO HIKUMA MYSELF.

OKAY.

AH... URM...

I'LL COME ALONG WITH YOU THEN.

ANY PROBLEM...?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* EITHER. WHY DOES HE TOLERATE YOSHIAKI-*SAMA*, WHO'S JOINED HANDS WITH TAKEDA AND ASAKURA AND PLOTS AGAINST HIM.

WASN'T IT NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* WHO MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR YOSHIAKI-*SAMA* TO BECOME SHOGUN?

WHY DOES YOSHIAKI-*SAMA* DEFY NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* AND CORRESPOND SECRETLY WITH TAKEDA AND ASAKURA? I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

THE PROBLEM IS, EVEN THOUGH IT'S HEAVY, NOW THAT WE'VE PICKED IT UP, AND SINCE WE'RE THE FIRST ONE TO DO SO, IT'S NOT SO EASY TO DROP IT. SUCH IS HUMAN NATURE...

LET'S SAY WE'RE CARRYING A HEAVY BURDEN, WHICH WE WISH WE COULD THROW AWAY.

ALL NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* HAS TO DO IS REMOVE YOSHIAKI-*SAMA* FROM THE SHOGUN'S POST.

IF HE WAS ODA'S ENEMY, THERE WOULD BE A WAY TO ATTACK HIM. IF HE WAS ON ODA'S SIDE, THERE WOULD BE A WAY TO HANDLE HIM.

SHOGUN YOSHIAKI-*SAMA* IS INDEED THE HEAVIEST BURDEN ON NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* TODAY.

BUT...

AS FOR NOBUNAGA-*SAMA*, YOSHIAKI-*SAMA* IS HIS FLAG MARK, INSTALLED BY NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* HIMSELF. THAT'S WHY HE CANNOT POSSIBLY UNMASK THE FLAG AND TAKE IT DOWN.

HIS HEART IS WITH OUR ENEMY, WHILE HIS FACE ISN'T.

ON THE SURFACE, YOSHIAKI-*SAMA* IS ON ODA'S SIDE, WHILE IN FACT, HE IS OUR ENEMY.

SO IF HE WANTS TO SEND A LETTER TO COMMUNICATE HIS WISHES TO ANY PROVINCE, HE MUST FIRST NOTIFY NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* AND OBTAIN AN ACCOMPANYING LETTER. NOT ONLY THAT, HE HAS TO CANCEL ALL COMMANDS AND ORDERS HE'S PREVIOUSLY ISSUED AND START FRESH.

AS FOR YOSHIAKI-*SAMA*, ASAYAMA NICHIJŌ-*SAMA* AND AKECHI MITSUHIDE-*SAMA* KEEP HIS HANDS FIRMLY TIED IN ACCORDANCE WITH NOBUNAGA-*SAMA*'S WRITTEN AND SEALED INSTRUCTIONS.

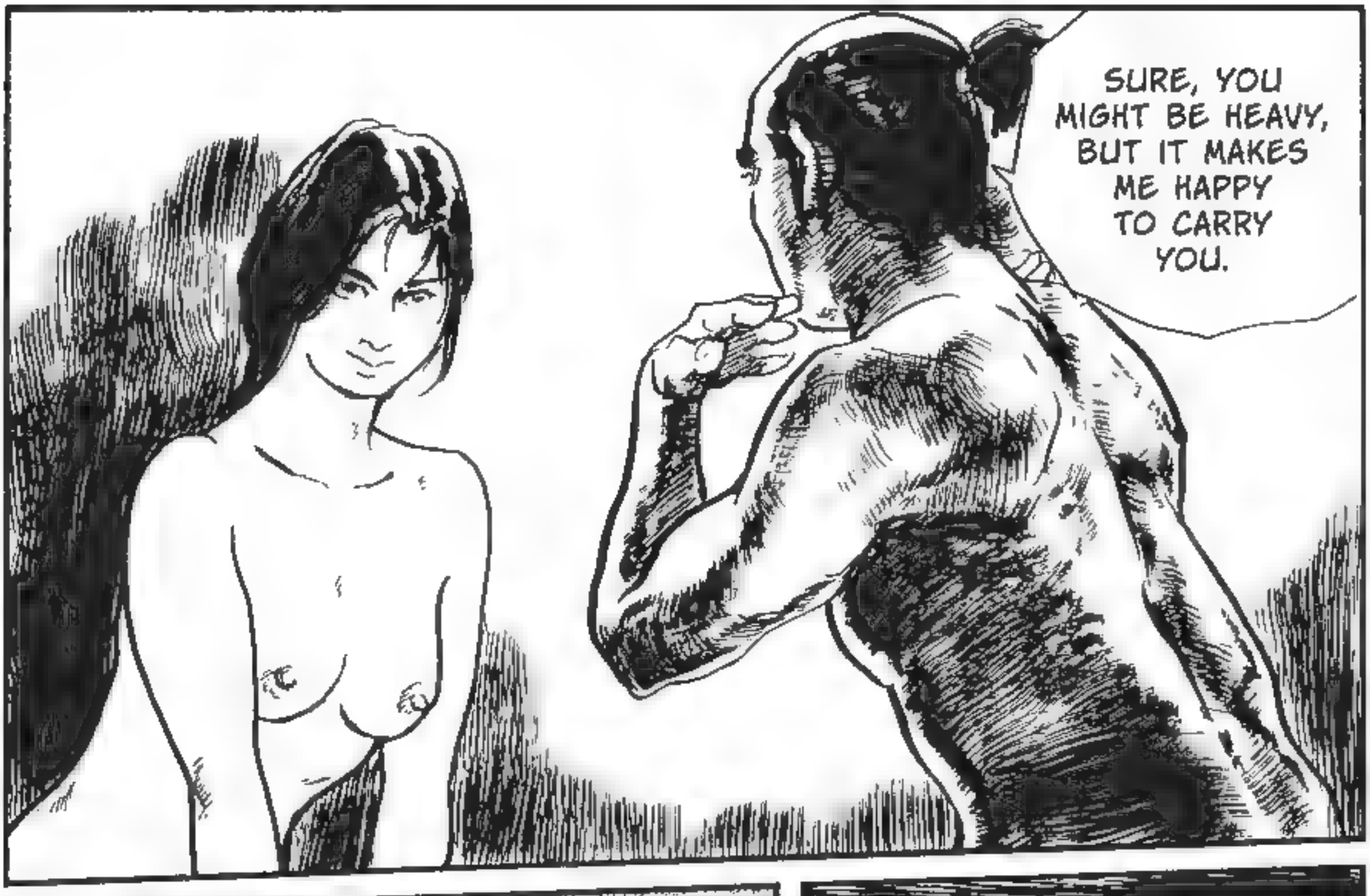
AND YET IF HE IGNORES THE PROBLEM, WHO KNOWS WHAT YOSHIAKI-*SAMA* WILL DO. THINGS ARE GETTING OUT OF HAND. INDEED, NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* IS AT QUITE A LOSS.

IN SHORT, HE IS A SHOGUN WHO HAS NO POWER TO DO ANYTHING ON HIS OWN.

THAT'S WHY HE'S DISPLEASED AND PLOTS TO DESTROY NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* BY URGING TAKEDA AND ASAKURA TO WAGE WAR AGAINST HIM.

IT'S UNDERSTOOD THAT HE TRANSFERRED AND ASSIGNED ALL POLITICAL POWER TO NOBUNAGA-*SAMA*. AND HE IS TO DEVOTE HIMSELF TO THE COURT.

INDEED, FOR NOBUNAGA-SAMA, YOSHIAKI-SAMA IS A HEAVY LOAD TO CARRY. IN FACT, HE IS A HATEFUL BURDEN BECAUSE HE CANNOT BE PUT DOWN.
AND I'M YOUR...
AS FOR MILORD... I SAY TSUKIYAMA-SAMA IS HIS BURDEN... IN MANY WAYS.
TREASURE.


SURE, YOU MIGHT BE HEAVY, BUT IT MAKES ME HAPPY TO CARRY YOU.

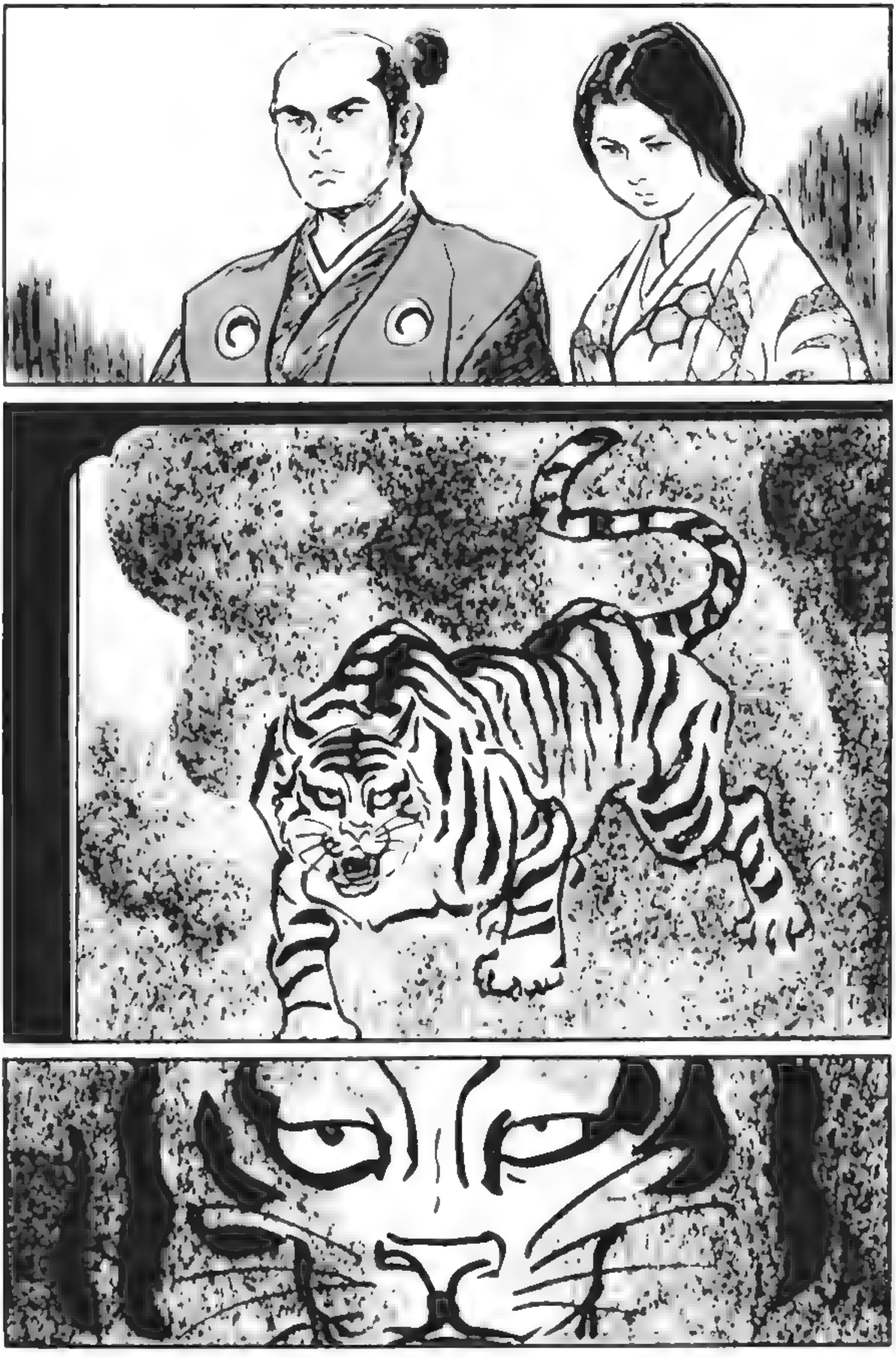
MM. YOU'RE AS FIT AS EVER, TSUKUMO. WHAT GREAT SKILL.

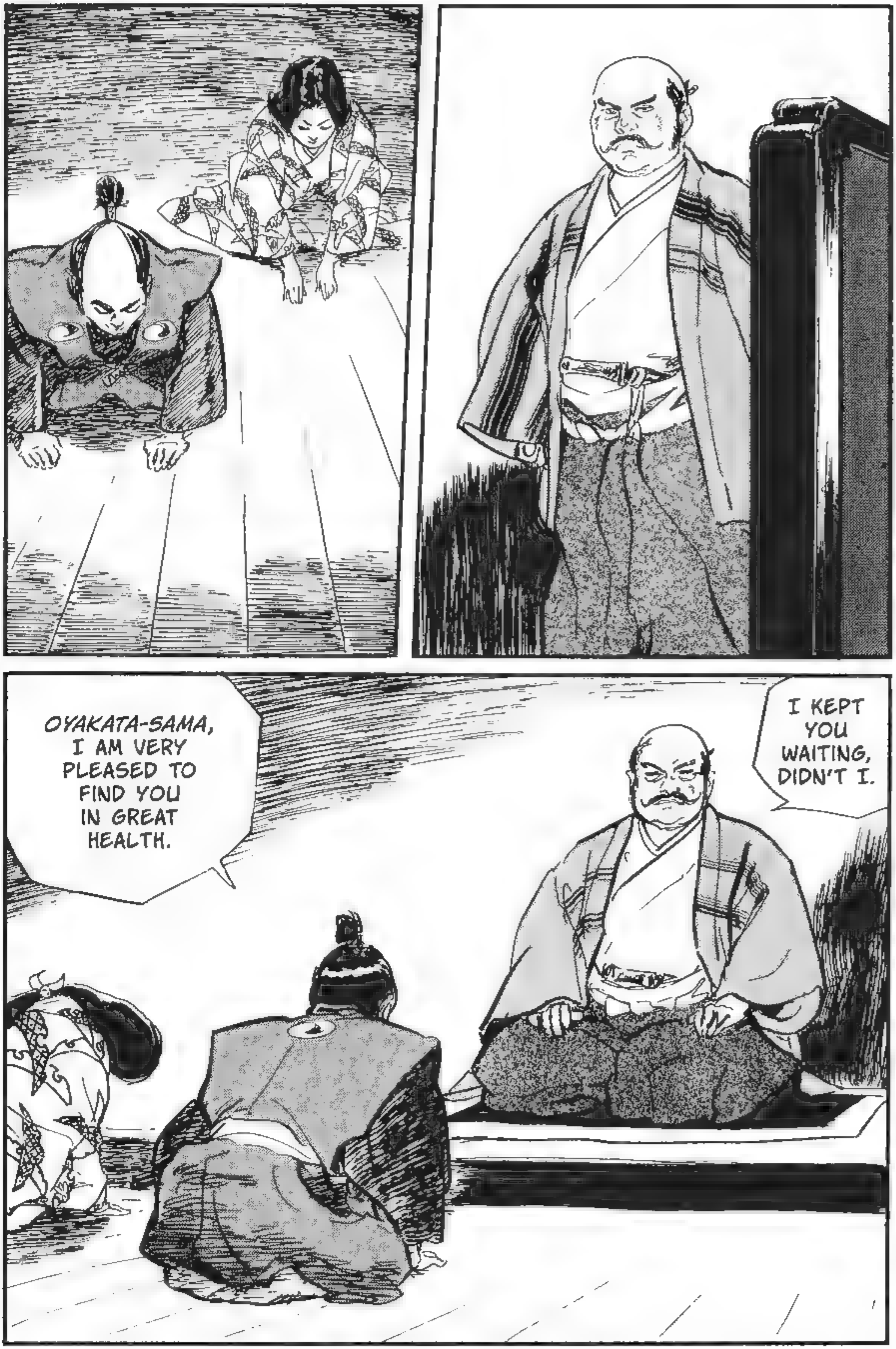
I'LL CHANGE MY NAME TO "HARBOR CLOUD." IT WILL MAKE ME LIGHTER.

HA HA HA HA

PHT!

TAKEDA SHINGEN'S MANSION IN KOFUCHŪ, KAI.




OYAKATA-SAMA, I AM VERY PLEASED TO FIND YOU IN GREAT HEALTH.
I KEPT YOU WAITING, DIDN'T I.

TSUKUMO, TOO, SEEMS LIKE A GOOD WIFE. LATE KANSUKE MUST BE PLEASED.

I'M GLAD YOU ARE WELL TOO. YOU FOUGHT EXCELLENTLY AT ANEGAWA, I HEAR.

IF I'M A CLOUD, EVEN IF I BECOME A BURDEN, I WON'T BE SO HEAVY, I THOUGHT...

TSUKUMO, THE HARBOR CLOUD, HUH? WHY?

I CHANGED MY NAME TO "HARBOR CLOUD."

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.

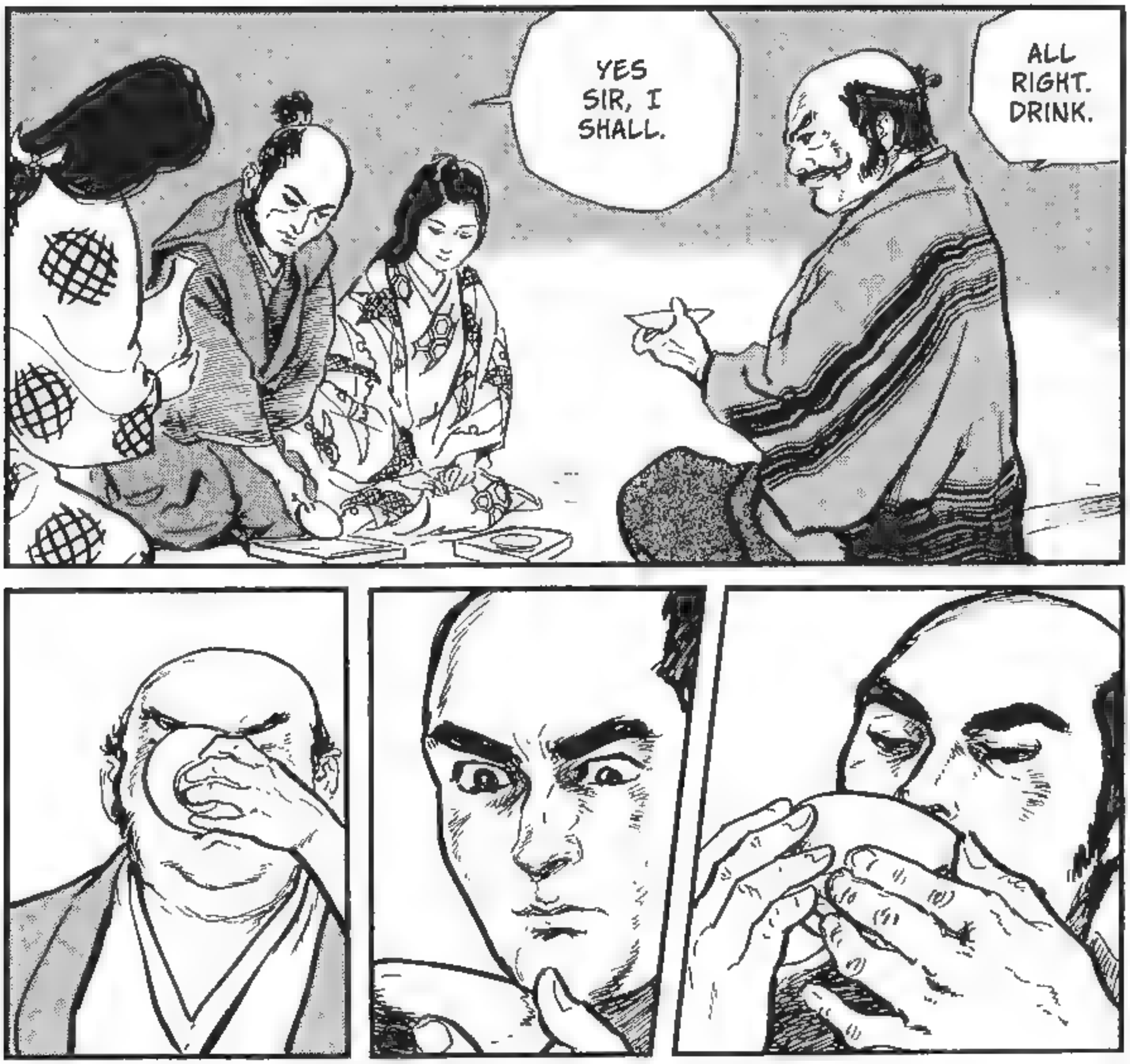
UWA HA

LET'S DRINK!

I'LL TAKE ACTION, HANZŌ!

NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES YOU ASK, MY ANSWER IS THE SAME.

LET ME ASK AGAIN. WHY DON'T YOU COME WORK FOR ME?


YES SIR, I SHALL.
ALL RIGHT. DRINK.

YES.
TSUKUMO, YOU TOO.

EXCEPT IN BATTLE.

IT'S WATER. I DOUBT IF WE'LL EVER SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN ALIVE.

IT'S ONLY BECAUSE I STAYED PUT THAT NOBUNAGA COULD WAGE WAR AT ANEGAWA.

YES?

LISTEN.

IF YOU DIDN'T, HŌJŌ WOULD'VE STRUCK IN YOUR ABSENCE.

WHY DID I STAY PUT?

UJIMASA, MEANWHILE, IS VERY ANGRY AT TERUTORA OF ECHIGO.

THAT IS TRUE, BUT HŌJŌ UJIYASU IS BEDRIDDEN. TERMINALLY ILL, HE WON'T LAST TILL OCTOBER.

I'M CLOSER TO UJIMASA AT THIS POINT. HEH HEH HEH. ONCE UJIYASU PASSES AWAY, I WILL JOIN HANDS WITH HŌJŌ...

I'VE COMMENCED WAR AGAINST HŌJŌ THREE TIMES SO FAR, AND EVERY TIME, UJIMASA SOUGHT TERUTORA'S HELP, ASKING FOR REINFORCE-MENTS, BUT TERUTORA NEVER SENT HIS TROOPS.

I'LL ALLY WITH ASAKURA AND AZAI, AND EVEN WITH HONGANJI TEMPLES.

...AND ATTACK IEYASU-*DONO*.

USING THAT RELATIONSHIP, I CAN SET THE FOLLOWERS OF KAGA, NOTO, AND ECHIGO AGAINST UESUGI. THAT WILL KEEP UESUGI IN CHECK AND IMMOBILIZED. I'LL ALSO PLACE THE FORCES OF HONGANJI IN CHARGE OF NOBUNAGA. AND ONCE I MOBILIZE AZAI-ASAKURA, I WILL STRIKE IEYASU-*DONO*.

THIS MEANS HONGANJI AND I ARE BROTHERS-IN-LAW.

I'M SURE YOU HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN MY WIFE IS SANJŌ KIMIYORI'S SECOND DAUGHTER, AND HIS THIRD DAUGHTER IS MARRIED TO KENNYO OF HONGANJI TEMPLE.

NOBUNAGA WON'T BE ABLE TO TAKE ACTION, AND IEYASU-*DONO* WILL BE ISOLATED. THE ODA-TOKUGAWA ALLIANCE WILL BE USELESS THEN.

諏方南宮上下大明神

*BANNER·
MOVE AS SWIFT AS A WIND, STAY AS SILENT AS A FOREST. ATTACK AS FIERCE AS FIRE, DEFEND AS UNMOVABLE AS A MOUNTAIN

疾如風徐如林侵掠如火不動如山

IT WILL BE A GREAT WAR, HANZŌ

EVEN IF HE WANTED TO.

HE CAN'T.

YOU THINK UESUGI TERUTORA WOULD MAKE A MOVE?

THE ONLY THING IEYASU-*DONO* CAN DO IS TO ALLY WITH UESUGI. BUT PROBABLY THAT WON'T HELP MUCH.

IT'S SELF-EVIDENT. MY VICTORY IS A MATTER OF COURSE.

.....

WHICH SIDE DO YOU THINK WILL WIN THIS WAR, HANZŌ?

HA HA HA HA HA HA

GO BACK AND TELL IEYASU-*DONO* TO WAIT FOR ME WITH HIS NECK CLEANED.

FAREWELL, HANZŌ AND TSUKUMO.

IF YOU DIDN'T, I MIGHT'VE KILLED YOU.

HANZŌ. WHY DID YOU BRING TSUKUMO WITH YOU?

STUFF IT! HA HA HA HA HA.

GWA HA HA HA HA HA

OR I MIGHT'VE FINISHED YOU, *OYAKATA-SAMA.*

NOBUNAGA MOVED FROM GIFU TO YOKOYAMA CASTLE AND ATTACKED NODA AND FUKUSHIMA IN THE HUNT FOR THE REMNANTS OF MIYOSHI.

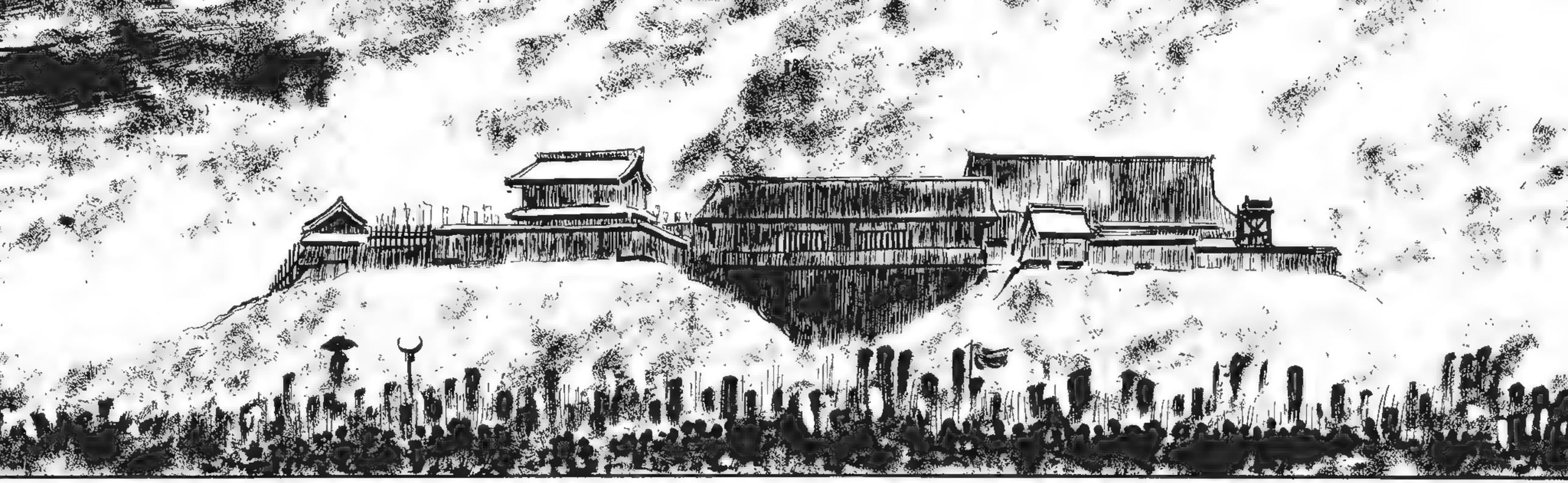
AUGUST, GENKI YEAR 1 (1570 A.D.) IEYASU WORKED ON ESTABLISHING AN ALLIANCE WITH UESUGI AND PREPARED TO ADVANCE HIS ARMY ON TAKEDA.

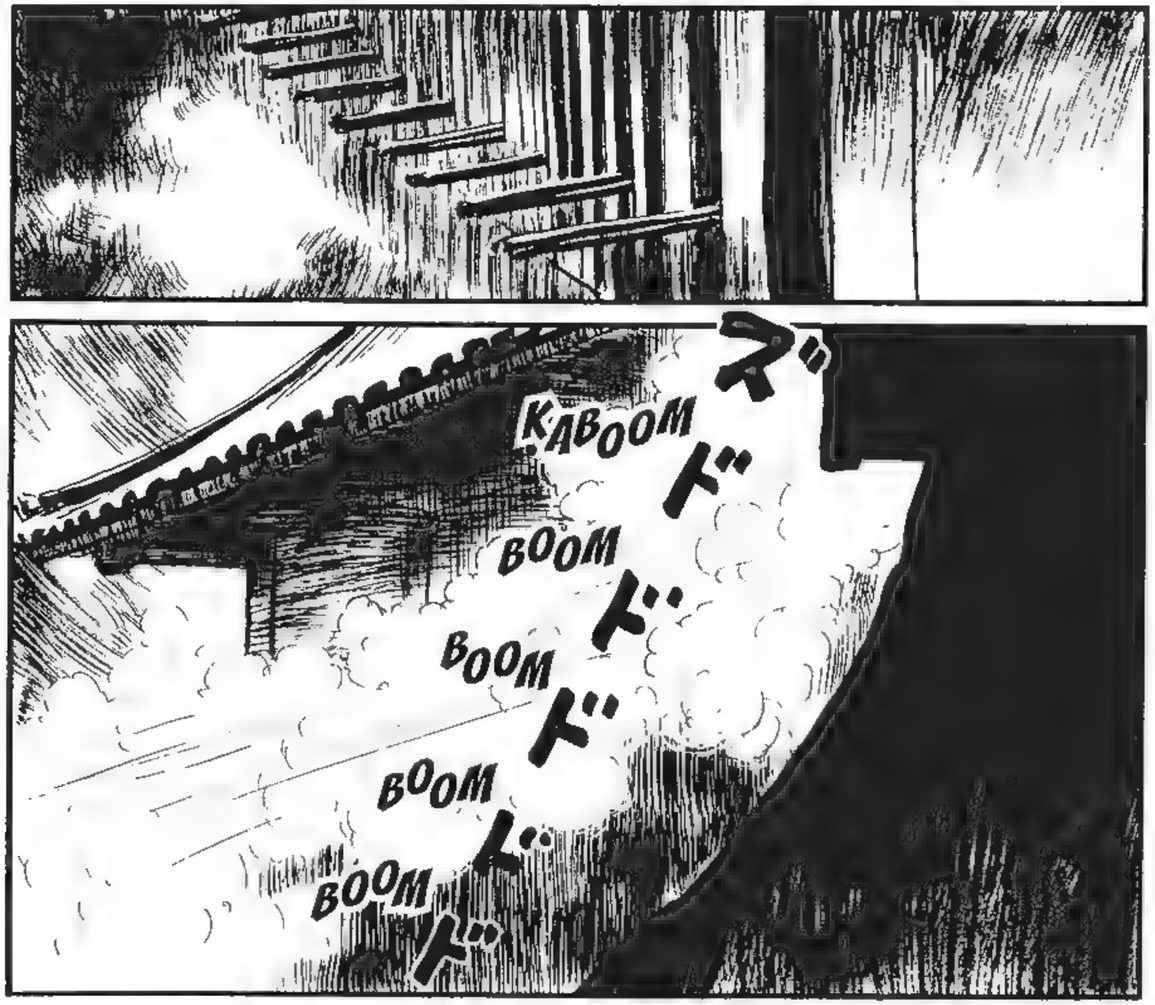
AND ON THE NIGHT OF SEPTEMBER 13TH...

FURTHERMORE, HE TOOK UP POSITION IN EBIE AND FOUGHT THE FOLKS OF NEGORO, SAIGA, AND THE KII PROVINCE.

THE CURTAIN FOR THE GREAT WAVE OF WAR--THE HEAVIEST BURDEN OF NOBUNAGA'S LIFE-- WAS THUS RAISED.

AS SHINGEN PREDICTED, HONGANJI TEMPLES OF ISHIYAMA AND OSAKA BARED THEIR FANGS AT NOBUNAGA.

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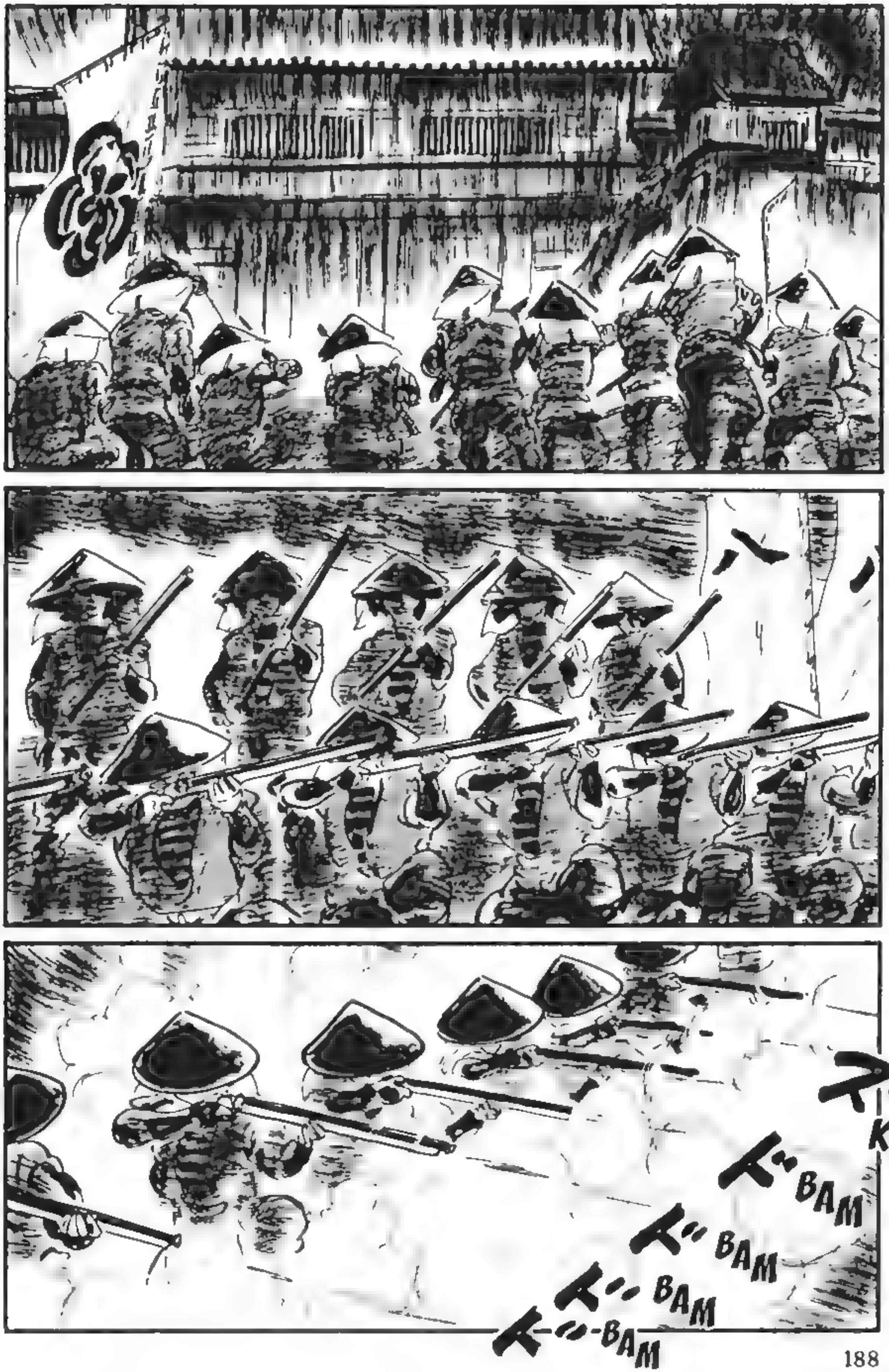
KA
K" BAM
K" BAM
K" BAM
K"-BAM

PULL BACK!
PULL BACK!

KA ZZ"

BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM

KA ZZ" BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM

KA BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM

KA BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM

KA BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM

POW POW POW POW POW

ドン POW
ドン POW
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ズドドドド KA BAM BAM BAM BAM

THE WAY THINGS STAND, WE CANNOT EVEN BUILD EARTH-WORK TO HELP ATTACK THE CASTLE. HOW SHOULD WE DEAL WITH THIS SITUATION? PLEASE PROVIDE US WITH SOME DIRECTION, MILORD.

WE'RE SHOOTING BACK AT THEM WITH EQUAL FIRE POWER. IT'S UNAVOIDABLE FOR THIS BATTLE TO BECOME A CLOSE AND BITTER CONTEST.

WE BELIEVE THE ENEMY HAS MORE THAN THREE THOUSAND GUNS. THE SAIGA FOLKS ARE THEIR MAIN STRENGTH.

YES SIR.

I WILL ISSUE ORDERS LATER.

WAIT A WHILE. DEFEND OUR POSITION IN EBIE TO THE DEATH AND WAIT.

THIS WAS DUE TO THE NUMBER OF MUSKETS THE ENEMY USED.

NOBUNAGA ATTACKED THE REMNANTS OF MIYOSHI, WHO HELD THE CASTLES OF NODA AND FUKUSHIMA, AND TOOK POSITION IN EBIE ABOUT 10 *CHŌ* TO THE NORTH. UNEXPECTEDLY, HOWEVER, THE BATTLE WAS IN DANGER OF BEING LOST.

MORE THAN FOUR THOUSAND WELL-TRAINED GUNMEN, KNOWN AND FEARED AS SAIGASHŪ, TOOK THE ENEMY'S SIDE. THE FIREARMS THEY BROUGHT AND THE ACCURACY WITH WHICH THEY HIT THEIR TARGETS HAD THE POWER TO SUDDENLY REVERSE THE TIDE OF WAR.

HM.

POW

POW

POW

POW

NOT YET, SIR.

IS BALDY RAT HERE?

IT'S BEEN TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS SINCE THE GUNS WERE INTRODUCED... FROM NOW ON, THE OUTCOME OF WAR WILL BE DETERMINED BY THE NUMBER OF SUCH WEAPONS, IT SEEMS.

POW

SO WHAT?! THEY'RE MERE WARRIOR MONKS! JUST IGNORE THEM!

THOSE FOLLOWERS OF THE HONGANJI TEMPLE! THEY'RE ADVANCING WITH UNSTOPPABLE MIGHT!

ON THE 16TH, THE ASAKURA-AZAI FORCE MADE AN ASSAULT ON SAKAMOTO, AND MORI SANZAEMON-*DONO* DIED IN BATTLE ON THE 19TH. DŌKE SEIJŪRŌ-*DONO* AND HIS BROTHER, SUKEJŪRŌ-*DONO*, DIED TOO.

I HAVE NEWS!

WE'RE BESIEGED ON ALL SIDES.

ASAKURA-AZAI FORCES BURNT DOWN ŌTSU, BABA, AND MATSUMOTO. BY THE 21ST, WE EXPECT THEM TO CROSS ŌSAKA AND STORM INTO THE CAPITAL FROM THE DIRECTION OF DAIGO-YAMASHINA.

HUFF HUFF HUFF

...JUST GOT HERE!

I... TŌKICHIRŌ ...!

IS TŌKICHIRŌ HERE YET?

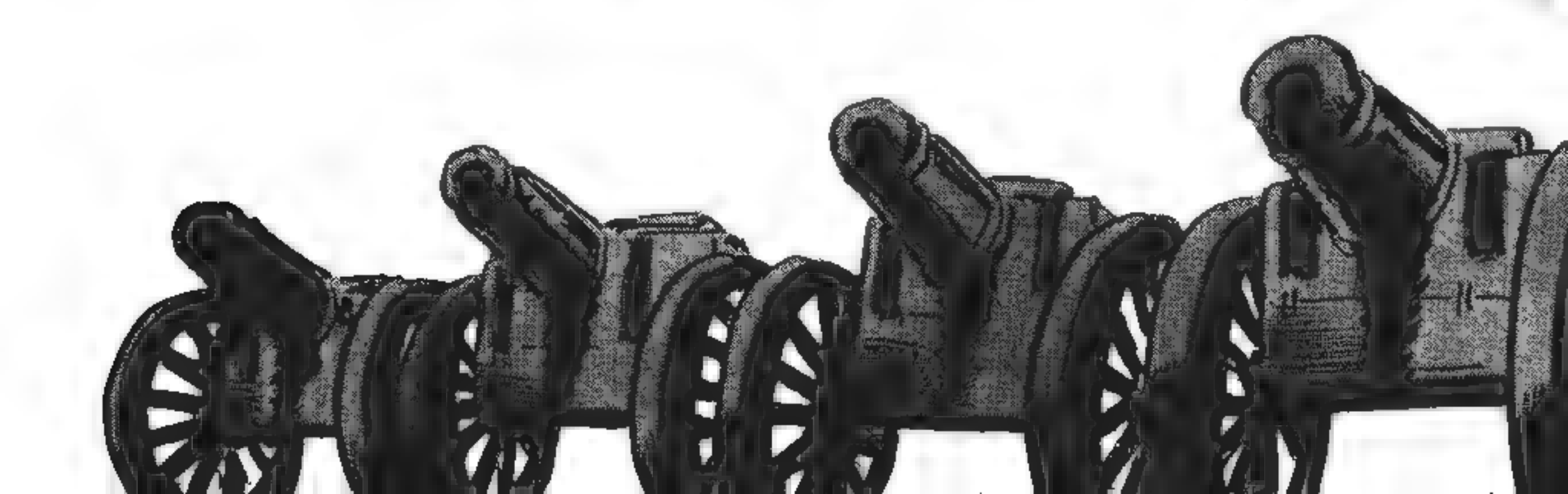
USE FOUR TO ATTACK NOW! FLATTEN IT AT ONCE!

YES SIR! SIX CANNONS--MADE TO DESTROY CASTLES! THEY ARE ALL BUILT!

DID YOU FINISH?!

YES SIR!

WITH THE REMAINING TWO, BLOW UP THE HONGANJI WARRIOR MONKS!



ゴゴゴ……

GOGOOOSHH

KA BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM

GOOSHH

HA HA HA HA HA

HA HA HA HA HA

TAKENAKA-*SAMA*, HOW DO YOU READ THE FUTURE NOW? PLEASE TELL ME WHAT TOKUGAWA SHOULD DO IN THE CURRENT SITUATION.

HMM. SO THAT'S WHAT SHINGEN-*DONO* SAID.

I'VE COME TO INFORM YOU OF THE ALLIANCE AND TO SEEK YOUR ADVICE ON HOW WE SHOULD PROCEED.

YES. MILORD IMMEDIATELY ALLIED WITH UESUGI-*SAMA*.

HAVE YOU TOLD IEYASU-*DONO* ABOUT IT?

IF TAKEDA IS TAKING THE FIELD, IEYASU-*DONO* WILL FACE A WAR NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO WIN.

BUT BY JOINING HANDS WITH HŌJŌ, IF TAKEDA IS COMING UP INTO THE WEST, MUSTERING ALL HIS FORCES...

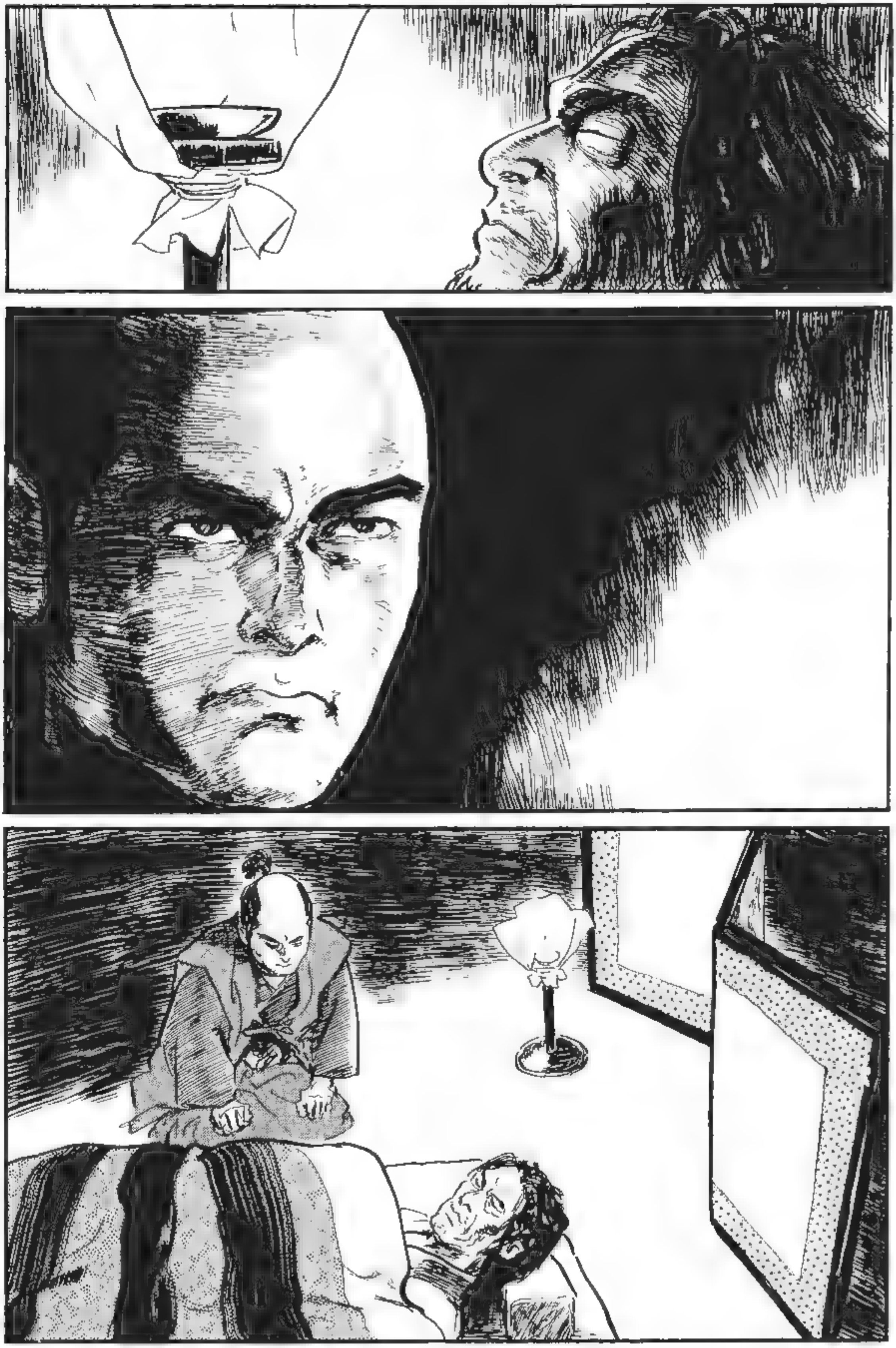
UNTIL NOW, TAKEDA COULD NOT MAKE A MOVE BECAUSE OF HŌJŌ.

TOKUGAWA WILL HAVE NO CHANCE OF VICTORY.

TAKEDA OUTNUMBERS US BY A SEVEN-TO-THREE RATIO. THEIR STRENGTH FAR EXCEEDS ASAKURA AND AZAI.

NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* WON'T BE ABLE TO HELP, AND IEYASU-*DONO* WILL HAVE TO FACE SHINGEN-*DONO* ALONE. AND EVEN IF WE, ODA-TOKUGAWA, OPPOSED TAKEDA TOGETHER...

YOU ALREADY KNEW IT, HANZŌ-*DONO*. THAT'S WHY YOU'VE COME TO SEE ME.



ONLY ONE WAY.
THERE'S ONE...
HANZŌ-*DONO*, YOU MUST TERMINATE TAKEDA SHINGEN.

WHA...

USE EVERY *SHINOBI* TECHNIQUE YOU POSSESS AND ASSASSINATE SHINGEN.

IT'S FINE TO VANISH LIKE DEW ON THE BATTLE-FIELD.

WITHOUT TELLING IEYASU-*DONO*, RELYING ONLY ON YOUR OWN SKILL.

IF YOU THINK IT COWARDLY, GO AHEAD AND DIE IN WAR.

SUN AND MOON. DAY AND NIGHT. FRONT AND BACK. YIN AND YANG.

EVERYTHING IN THIS WORLD IS PAIRED THAT WAY.

NOW IF IT WAS IEYASU-*DONO* WHO CAME TO SEE ME, IT WOULD'VE BEEN A DIFFERENT STORY. HOWEVER, EVEN THOUGH YOU ARE HIS VASSAL, HANZŌ-*DONO*, IT'S YOU WHO'VE COME AND ASKED ME WHAT IEYASU-*DONO* SHOULD HAVE ASKED.

OFFICERS AND MEN. THEY ARE EITHER YIN OR YANG. HANZŌ-*DONO*, IF YOU ARE A YANG-TYPE OFFICER, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE COME HERE.

AS A VASSAL, YOU SHOULD BE SEEKING ORDERS ONLY FROM IEYASU-*DONO* AND BE WITH HIM WHETHER HE LIVES OR DIES.

IF YOU WANT TO BE A YANG-TYPE OFFICER, YOU SHOULD DISTINGUISH YOURSELF IN WAR AND MAKE YOURSELF KNOWN TO THE WORLD.

IT PROVES THAT YOU ARE A YIN-TYPE OFFICER, HANZŌ-*DONO*.

AND THAT'S WHY I SAID YOU MUST TERMINATE SHINGEN.

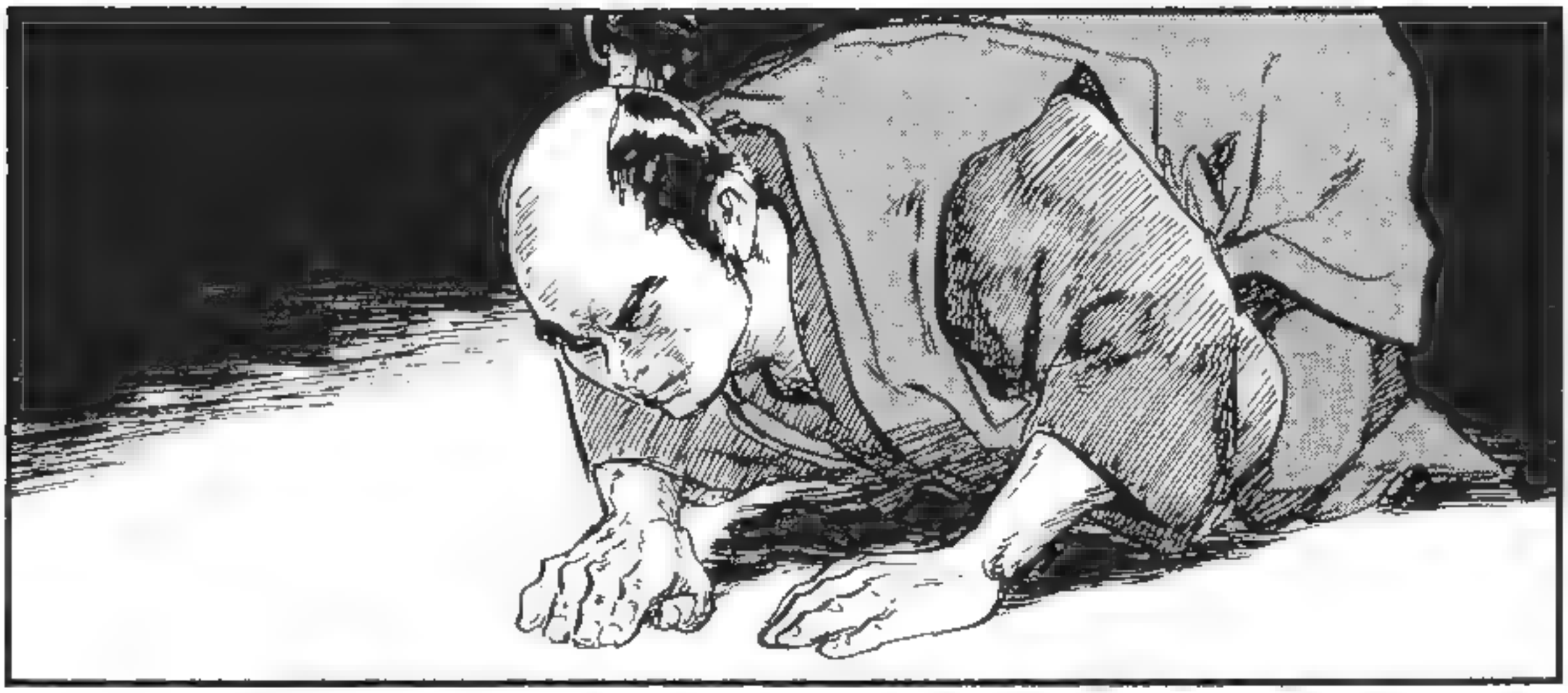
IEYASU-*DONO* SHALL BE THE ONLY ONE WHO EVER KNOWS YOUR FEAT.

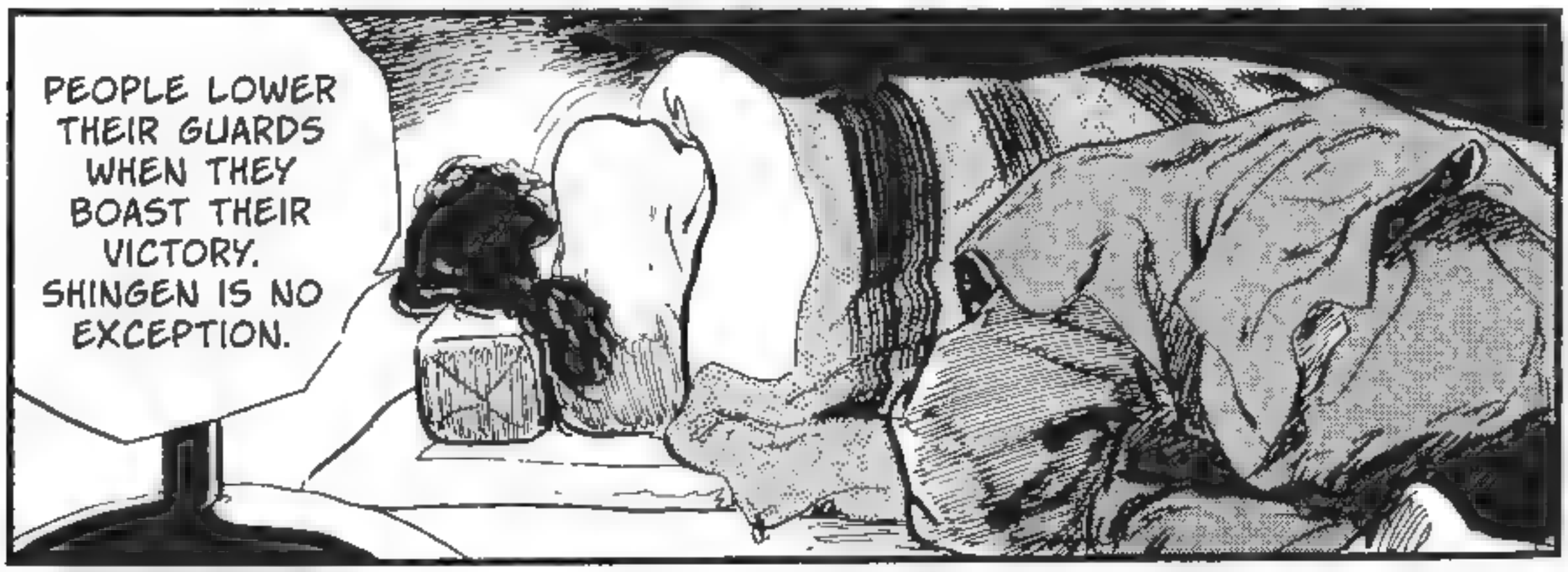
BUT IF INDEED YOU ARE A YIN-TYPE OFFICER AND KILL SHINGEN, YOU MUST NEVER COME OUT IN THE OPEN.

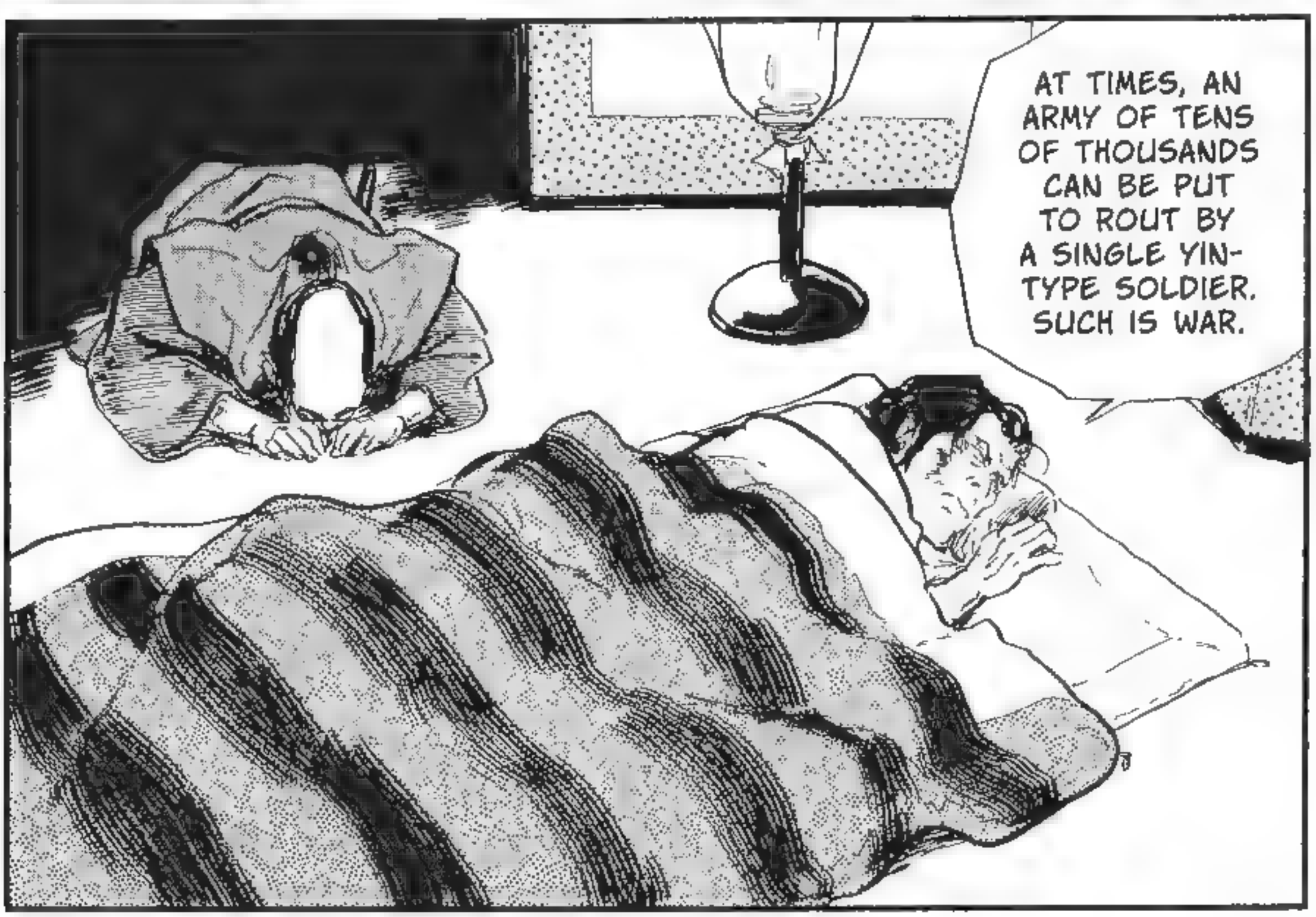
YOU MUST REMAIN SERVING IN THE DARK AND BE TOKUGAWA'S CORNERSTONE.

OTHERWISE WHY WOULD YOU HAVE COME IN PLACE OF YOUR MASTER, ON YOUR OWN VOLITION?

I BELIEVE YOU ARE A YIN-TYPE COMMANDER AND IT'S YOUR FATE TO LEAD A YIN-TYPE ARMY.




PEOPLE LOWER THEIR GUARDS WHEN THEY BOAST THEIR VICTORY. SHINGEN IS NO EXCEPTION.


AT TIMES, AN ARMY OF TENS OF THOUSANDS CAN BE PUT TO ROUT BY A SINGLE YIN-TYPE SOLDIER. SUCH IS WAR.

RUNNING AND SEEING IN THE DARK.

MY TECH-NIQUE IS ALL YIN.

IN-DEED.

FLYING IN THE AIR WITHOUT LEAVING A TRACE.

THAT'S WHY I AM A YIN-TYPE SOLDIER.

WITHOUT TELLING MILORD OR TSUKUMO...WITHOUT TELLING ANYONE AT ALL. WITH NO HELP WHATSO-EVER. ON MY OWN.

UNLESS I DO, TOKUGAWA HAS NO FUTURE.

WILL I BE ABLE TO KILL HIM?

TAKEDA SHINGEN? THAT GIANT OF A MAN?

"THERE ARE YIN AND YANG AMONG FEUDAL LORDS TOO. IF NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* AND IEYASU-*DONO* ARE YANG-TYPE LORDS, SHINGEN-*DONO* IS A YIN-TYPE.

"HE IS A MASTER OF STRATAGEMS, WHO, THROUGH DIPLOMACY, TRIES TO DETERMINE THE GENERAL STATE OF AFFAIRS EVEN BEFORE WAR ERUPTS. SO BE MINDFUL."

MMG...

BEFORE WE FIGHT, WILL THEY ALSO...SEND AN ASSASSIN AFTER MY LORD? IS THAT IT?

SHIN

HERE, SIR.

KUMOBIKI.

YES, SIR.

HASTEN THE DEATH OF HŌJŌ UJIYASU.

HERE.

NAGA-
KUBI.

YES,
SIR.

KILL
IEYASU.

SHRNG

ODAWARA
1535
IEYASU'S
HOME
CASTLE

THOSE WHO BEHOLD THE MORNING CLOUDS ARE... BEAUTIFUL... ARE BEAUTIFUL...

MORNING *KUMOBIKI* IS THE COLOR OF BLOOD. EVENING *KUMOBIKI* IS THE COLOR OF BLOOD.

THOSE WHO BEHOLD THE EVENING CLOUDS ARE... UGLY... ARE UGLY...

WILL PEOPLE MEET THEIR UGLY DEATH?

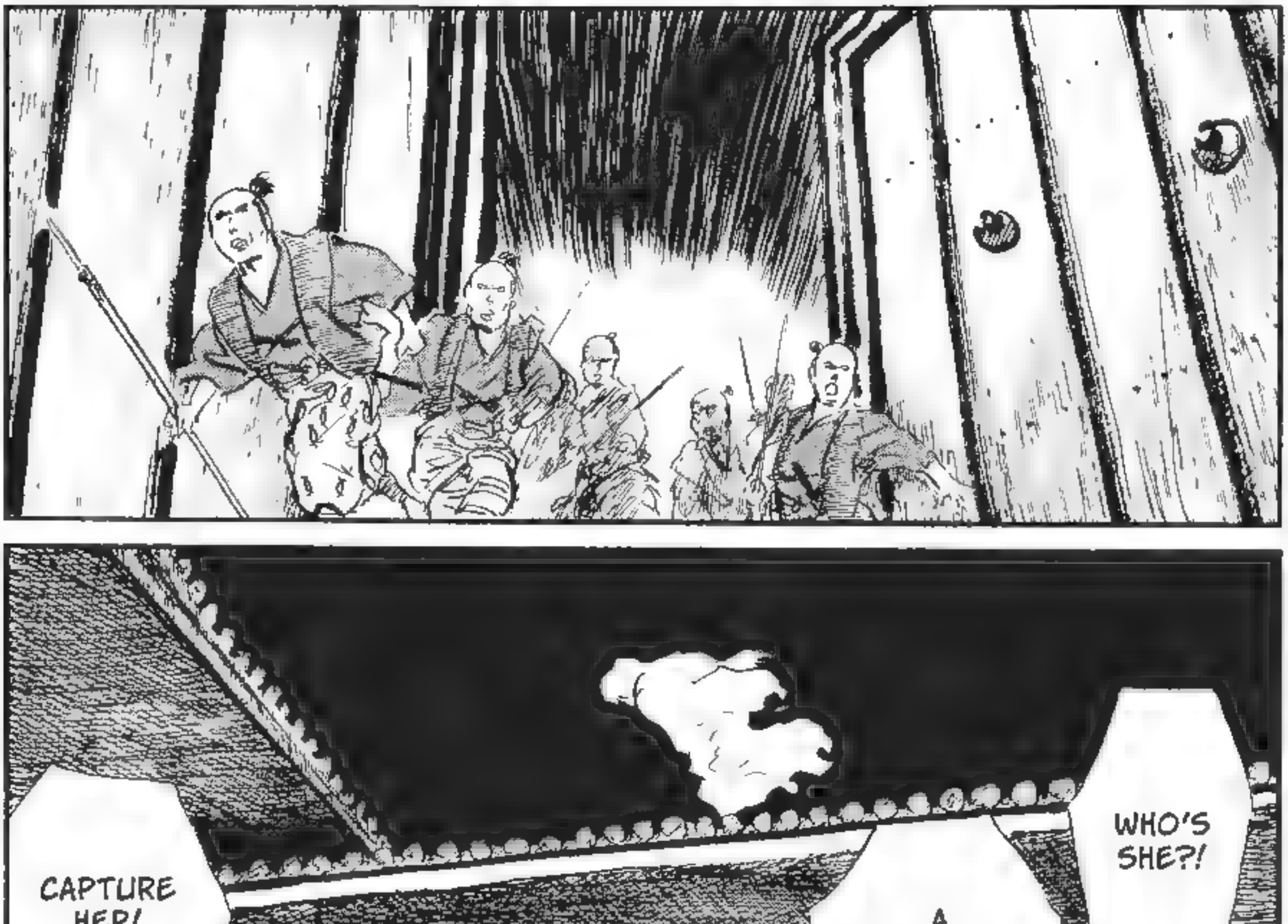
WILL PEOPLE MEET THEIR BEAUTIFUL DEATH?

WA!

?!

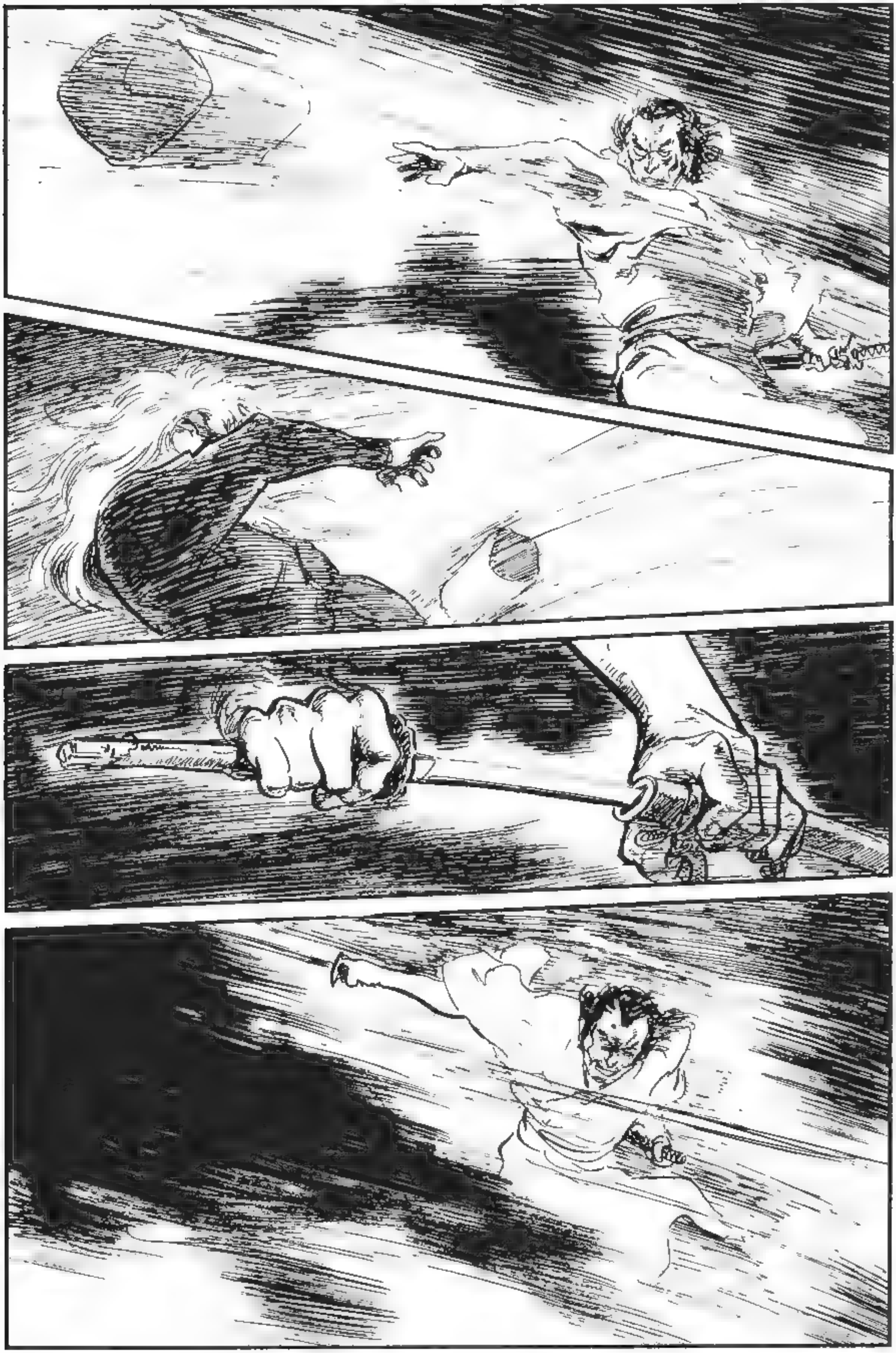
AN... AN UNEARTHLY WOMAN! GUARDS! GUARDS!

WHO... WHO THE HELL?!


CAPTURE HER!
A SPY?
WHO'S SHE?!

HO HO HO HO

FWÀ



UH
GH

BYU

GUEHHH

FOUGHT THIRTY-SIX TIMES. A MAN OF VALOR, WITH A FAMOUS SWORD MARK ON HIS FACE CALLED THE UJIYASU SCAR. HE'S ALSO KNOWN TO HAVE SEVEN SCARS ON HIS BODY.

HOW IM-PRESSIVE... HŌJŌ UJIYASU...

A FRIGHT-ENING MAN...HE FOUGHT WELL DESPITE THE PALSY HE WAS SUFFER-ING...

THE SCARS, THE PRIDE OF UJIYASU...

THERE'RE... NO SCARS...

GYA
SHUCK

I'M... KUMOBIKI, A TAKEDA *KUNOICHI.*

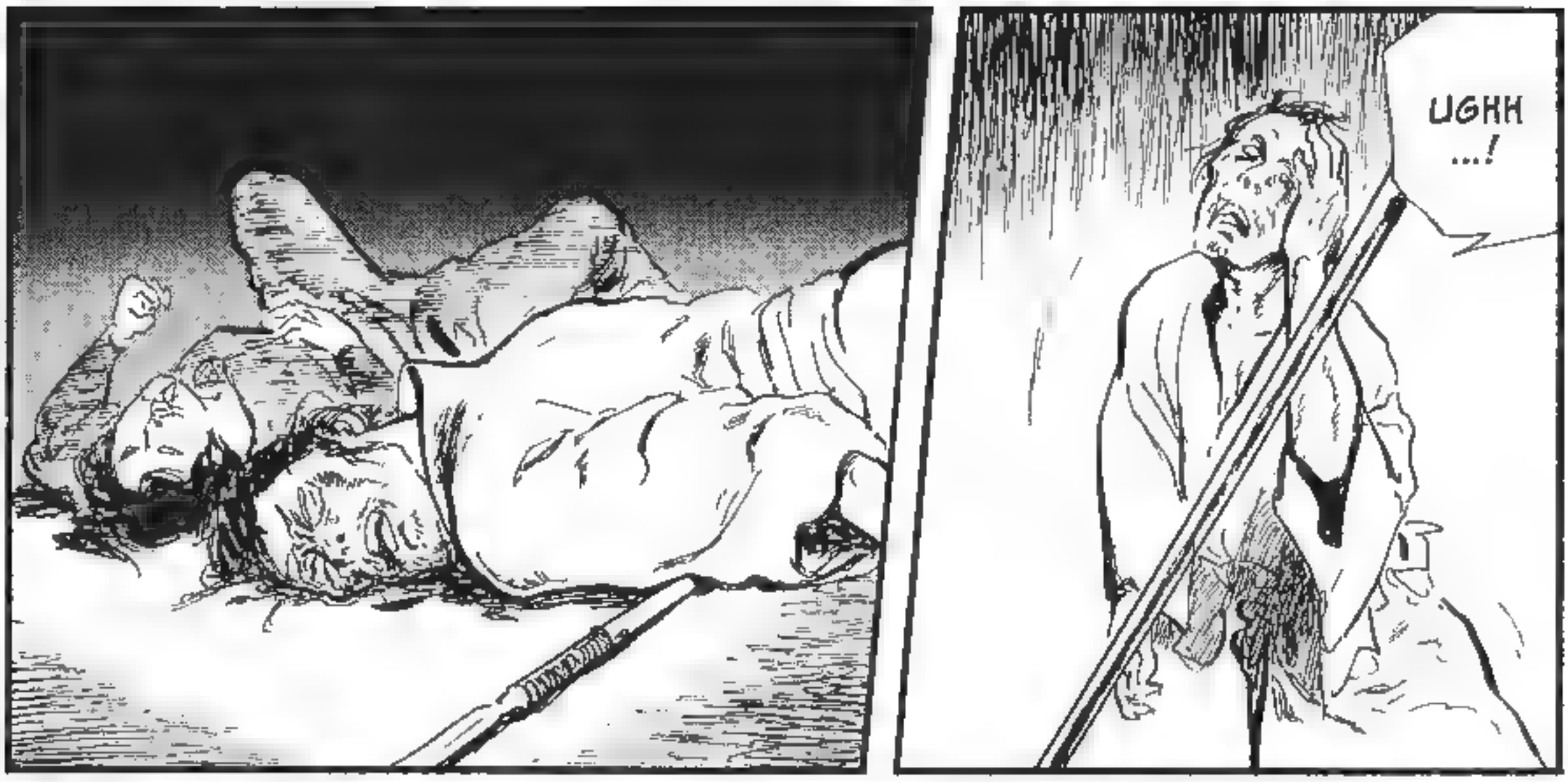
ARE YOU SHINGEN'S *SUPPA* OF *AYAKASHI*-- HIS PET?

I KNEW HE'D SEND ME ONE TO HASTEN MY DEATH...AND TRY TO SEVER OUR TIES WITH UESUGI.

GWA HA HA HA HA.

HA HA HA HA.

HEH HEH HEH. I'M STILL ALIVE AFTER ALL. I WON'T ALLOW A MAN LIKE SHINGEN TO ADVANCE HIS ARMY TO THE CENTER.


UGHH ...!

OCTOBER 3RD, GENKI YEAR 1 (1570 A.D.) HŌJŌ UJIYASU DIED. HE WAS FIFTY-SIX YEARS OLD.

AT AROUND THE SAME TIME THAT NIGHT, ANOTHER TAKEDA *SUPPA*, NAGAKUBI, WAS IN HAMAMATSU.

I WILL TAKE IEYASU'S HEAD.

HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA

HANZŌ! WHAT A THING TO SAY! YOU MUST BE HALF ASLEEP.

HA HA HA HA HA.

SHINGEN'S HENCHMAN WILL COME AFTER ME WHEN I'M LEAST EXPECTING IT? HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.

THERE'S NO WAY. THAT WON'T HAPPEN! A WARLORD'S HEAD IS A HEAD OF HONOR. LISTEN, ONLY BY TAKING IT IN BATTLE CAN IT BE RIGHTLY VALUED!

AND CONVERSELY, IF THE TRUTH OF MY MURDER GOT OUT, HIS MILITARY FAME WOULD BE HEAVILY TARNISHED. EVEN SHINGEN WOULD NOT DARE GO THAT FAR.

EVEN IF HE SUCCEEDS IN ASSASSINATING ME, THE CAUSE OF MY DEATH WOULD BE CALLED AN ILL-NESS AND NEVER RECOGNIZED AS ANYONE'S FEAT!

YOU SHOULD CROSS A BRIDGE WHEN YOU COME TO IT. NOT BEFORE.

AFTER ALL, HE IS THE TIGER OF KAI! HA HA HA HA HA HA.

BUT... IT'S IMPOS-SIBLE...

BUT THAT'S WHAT TAKENAKA HANBEI-*SAMA* WAS SAYING.

IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO YOU, MILORD... NOBUYASU-*SAMA* IS STILL TOO YOUNG. SHINGEN WILL HAVE NO TROUBLE TRAMPLING MIKAWA.

THAT'S WHY HE HAS NO QUALMS ABOUT USING SO MANY *KAGEMUSHA*. WHATEVER IT TAKES, SO LONG AS HE GETS THE RESULT HE WANTS, IT'S FINE WITH HIM. HE'S THAT SORT OF MAN.

HE IS THE KIND OF MAN WHO DOES NOT CARE ABOUT HIS MILITARY FAME.

WHEN HE PREPARES FOR HIS MARCH AGAINST THE CAPITAL, HE WILL REGARD BOTH HŌJŌ UJIYASU-*SAMA* AND YOU, MILORD, AS EYESORES.

WHAT IS IT?

I HAVE NEWS!

HŌJŌ UJIYASU-SAMA...

WE RECEIVED AN URGENT MESSAGE FROM OUR MAN IN ODAWARA.

YES.

DIED?

RUMOR HAS IT, HE DIED OF A STROKE AFTER HE TERMINATED AN ASSASSIN.

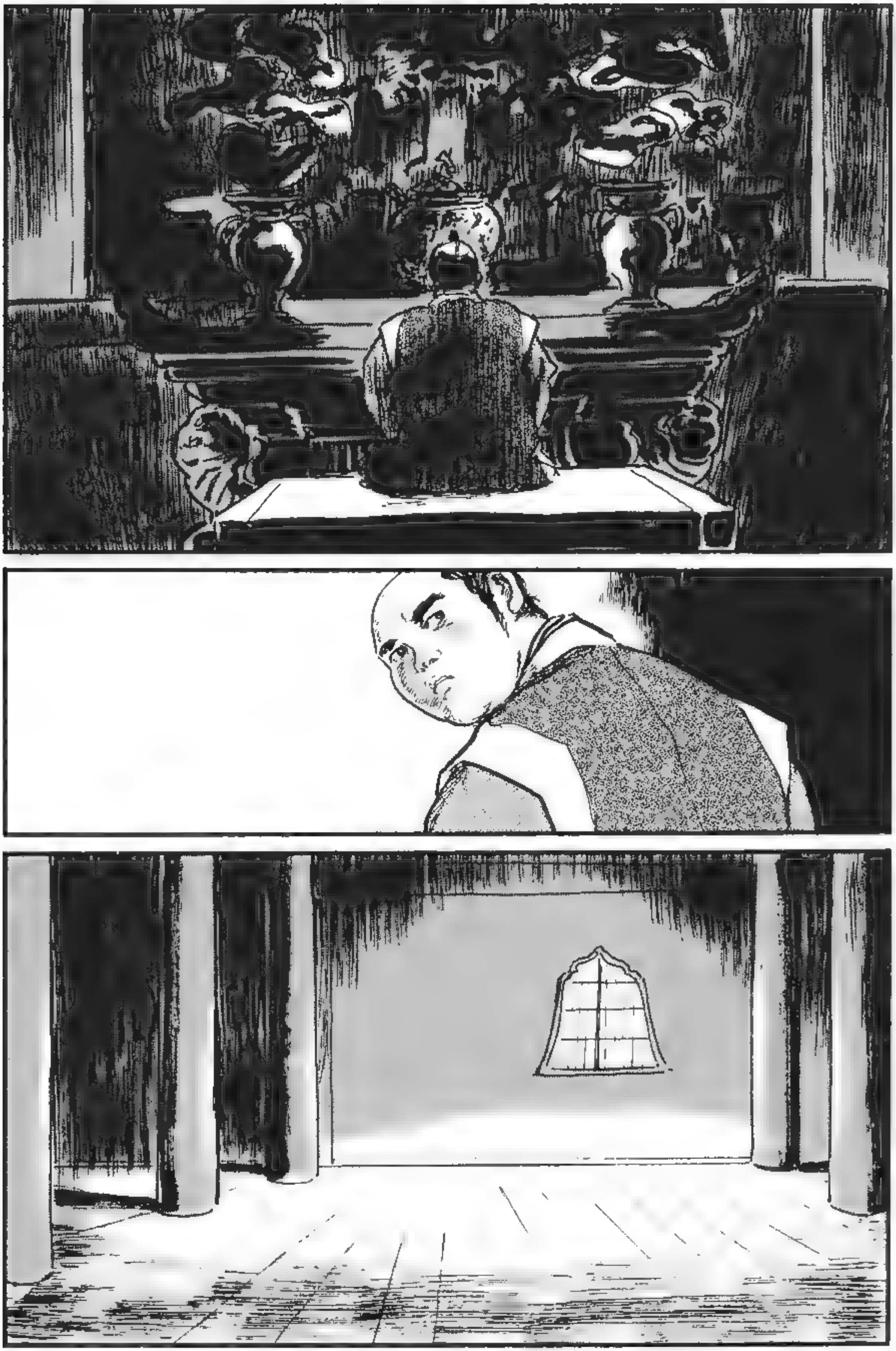
WHAT?

THERE'S ONE PLACE THAT LOOKS UNGUARD-ED.

WHAT'S YOUR PLAN?

I WILL HIDE THERE MYSELF. IF POSSIBLE AT ALL, I WOULD LIKE TO KILL THE INTRUDING ASSASSIN IN FRONT OF YOU.

IT'S THE BUDDHIST ALTAR ROOM.



HE TOLD ME TO PRACTICE *GONGYŌ* IN THE MORNING, EVENING, AND THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT...HOW TIRESOME.

THAT HANZŌ.

FUKUSHU FUMETSU FUKU FUKU
SHI GYO SHIKI YAKU BU NYOZE SHAKUSHI SESSHOU SEKKOU

I SHALL TAKE YOUR LIFE.

I AM CALLED NAGAKUBI.

WHO... WHO...ARE YOU?!

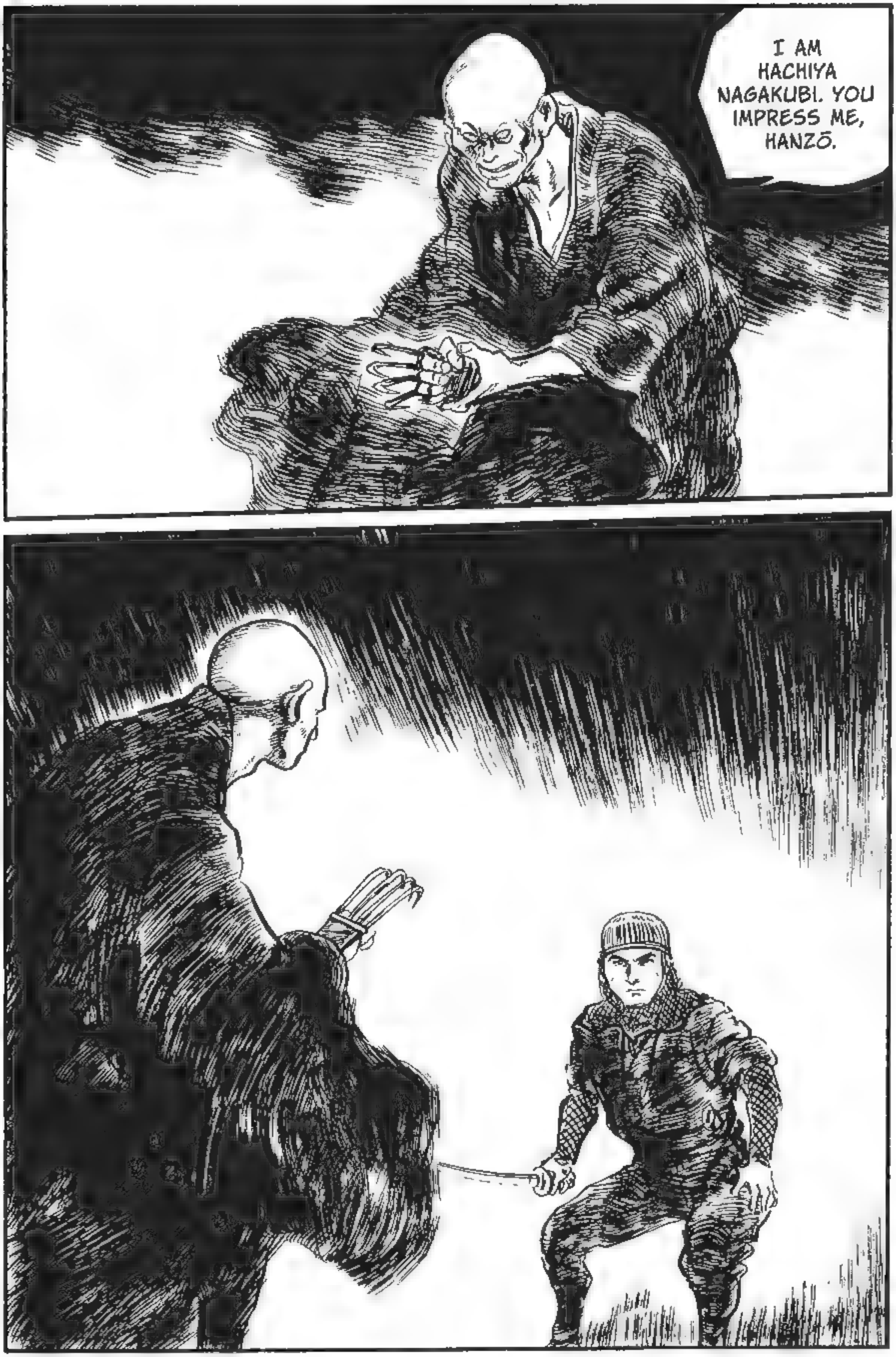
SWISH SWISH SWISH

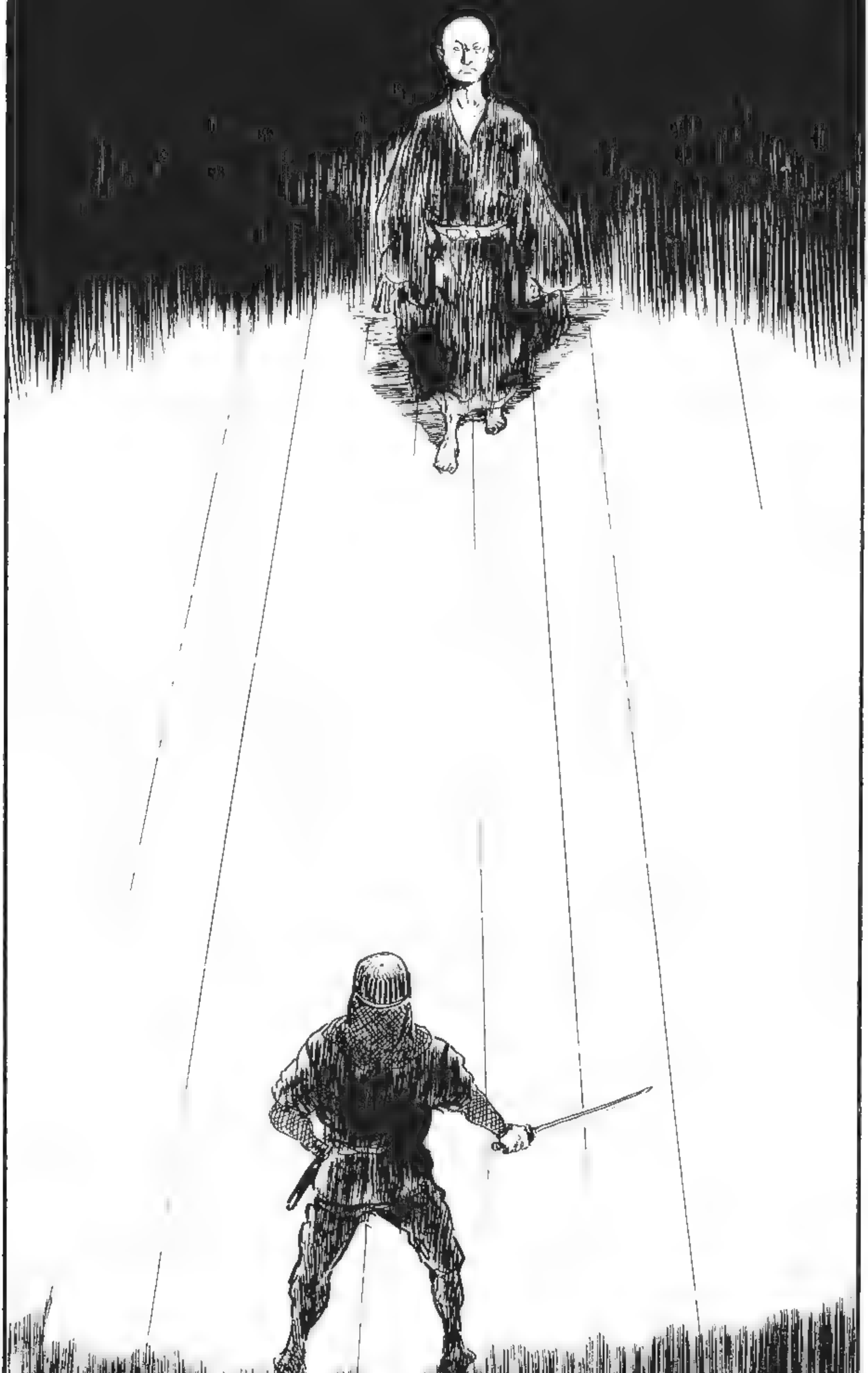
TUK TUK TUK

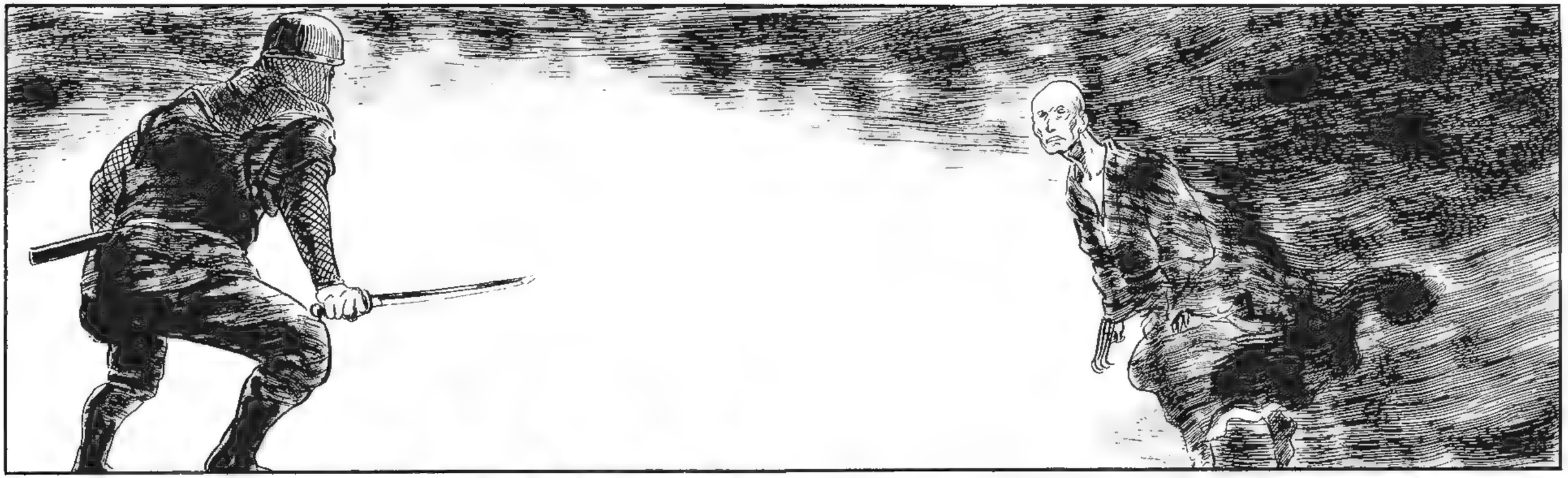
BRICK
GUARDS!

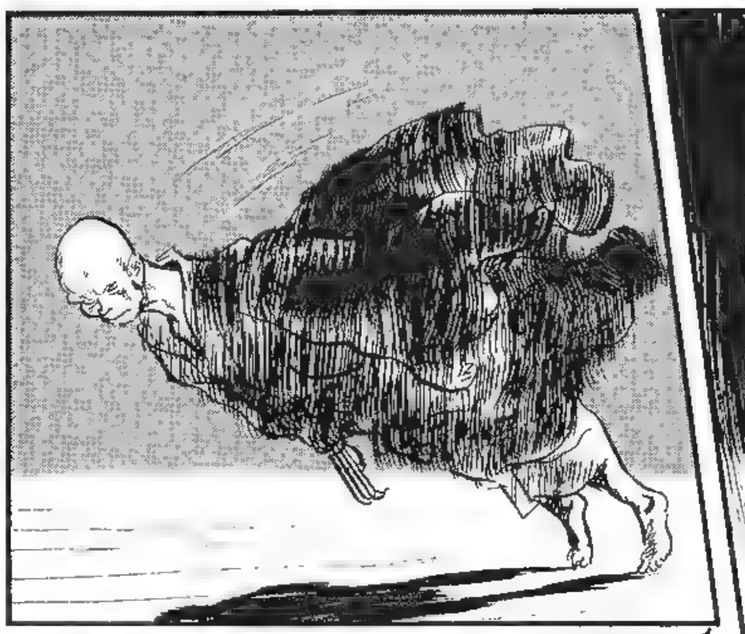
PHEW

I AM HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA.

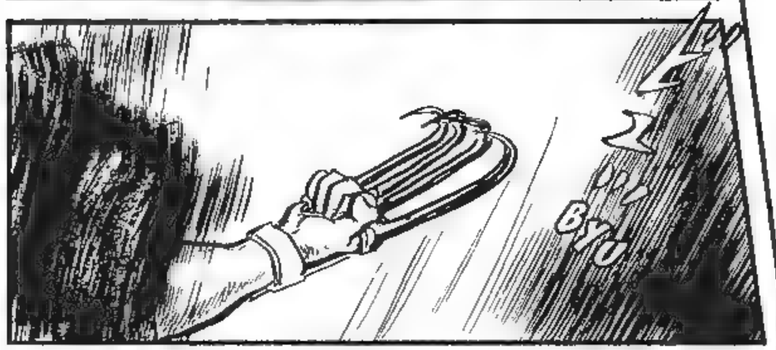

I AM HACHIYA NAGAKUBI. YOU IMPRESS ME, HANZŌ.

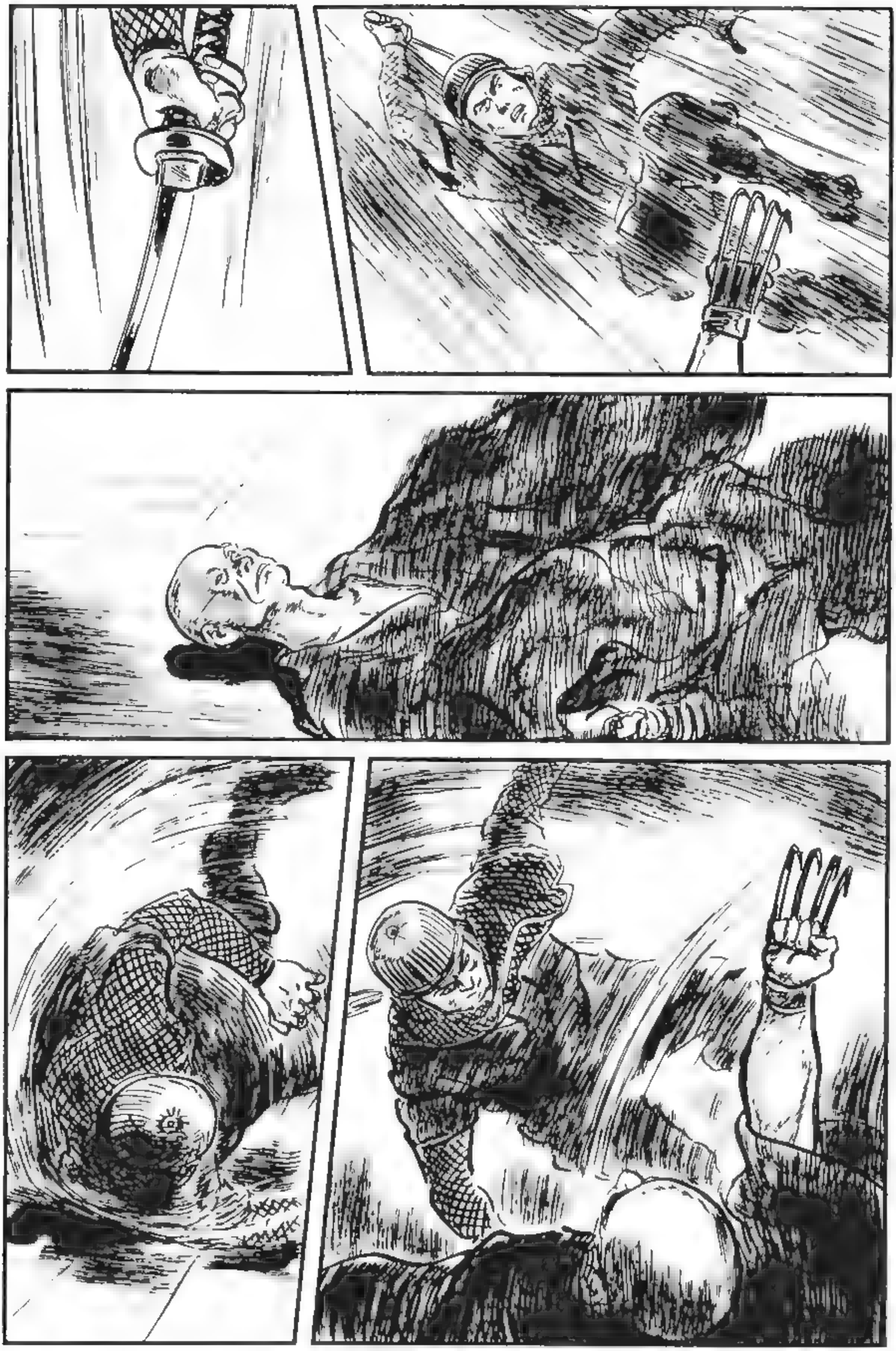






DASH

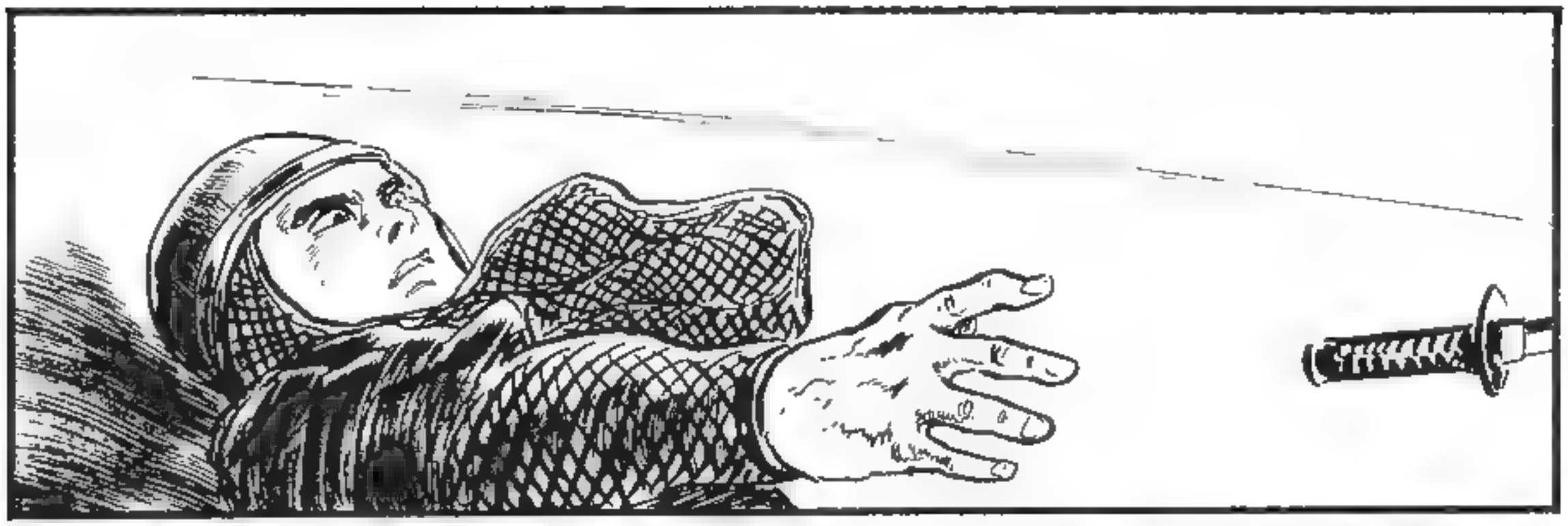

BYU

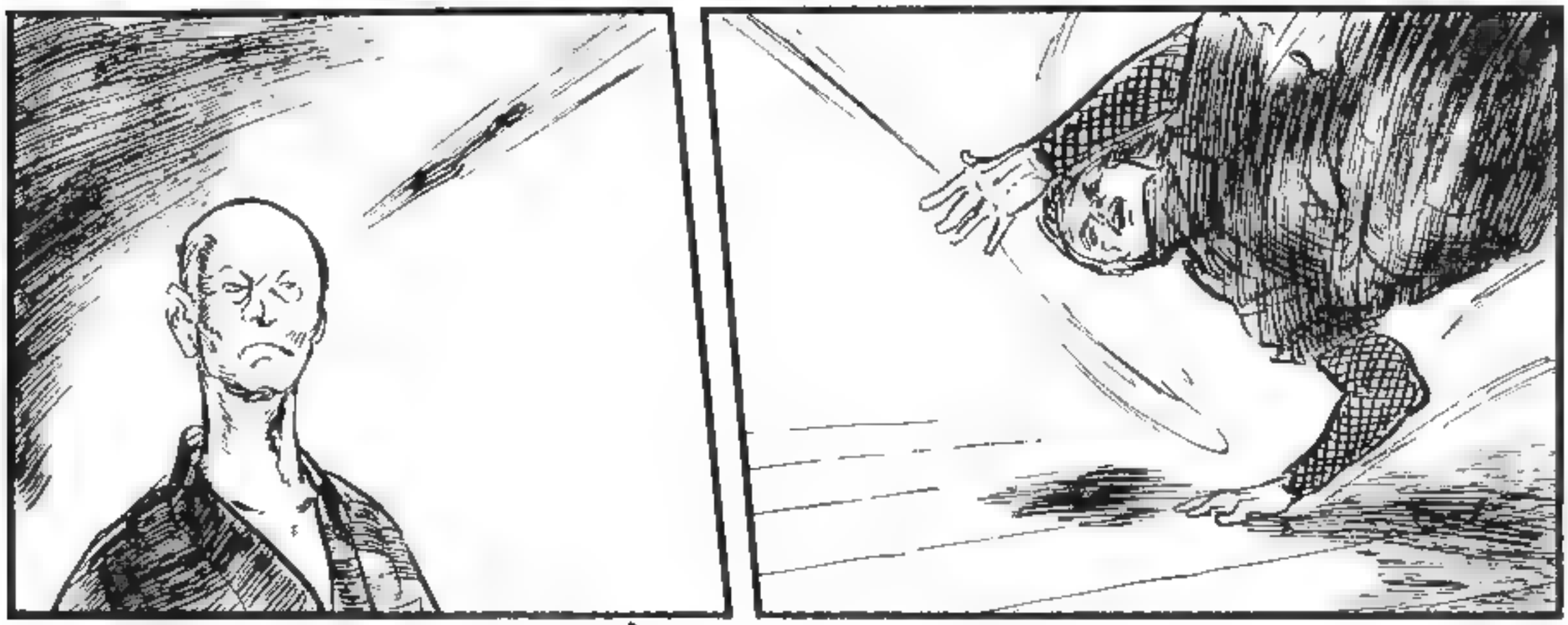


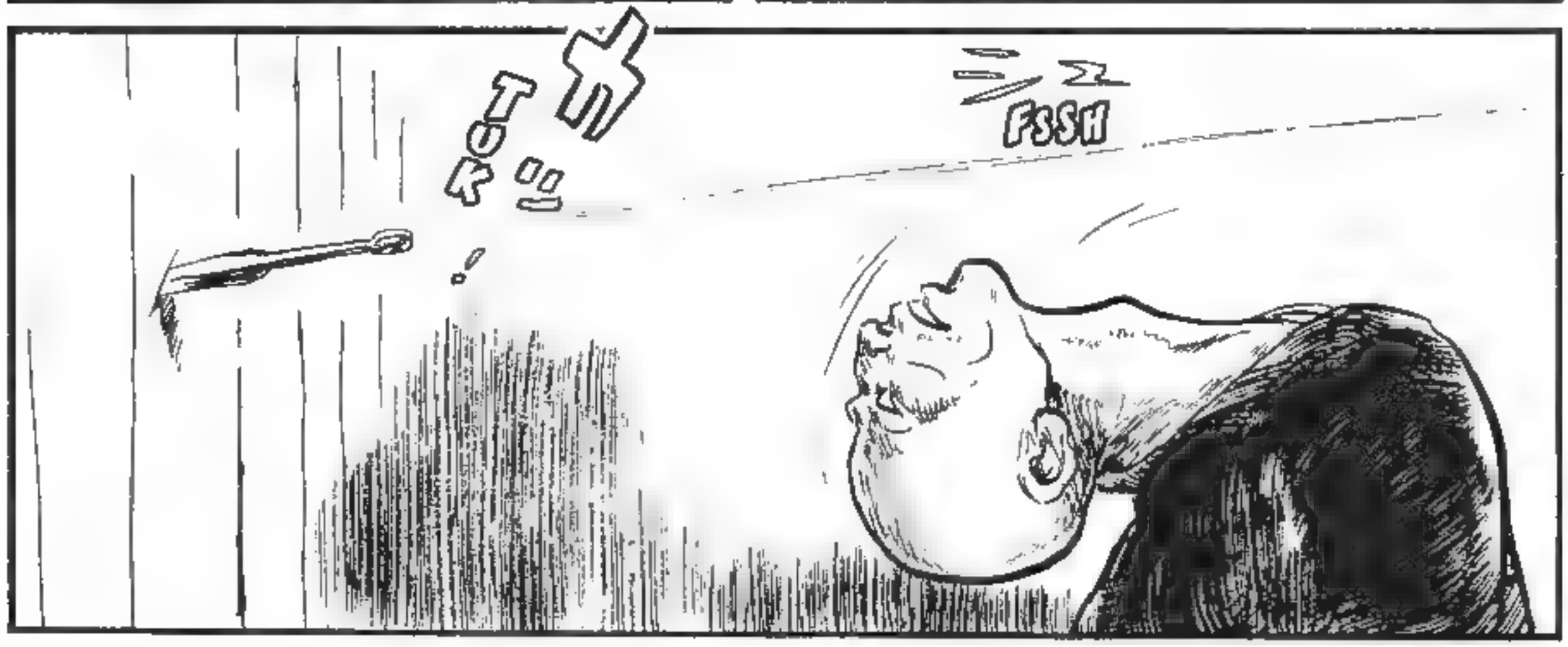
NO HUMAN COULD... MOVE LIKE HIM.

HE'S... A SPECTER.

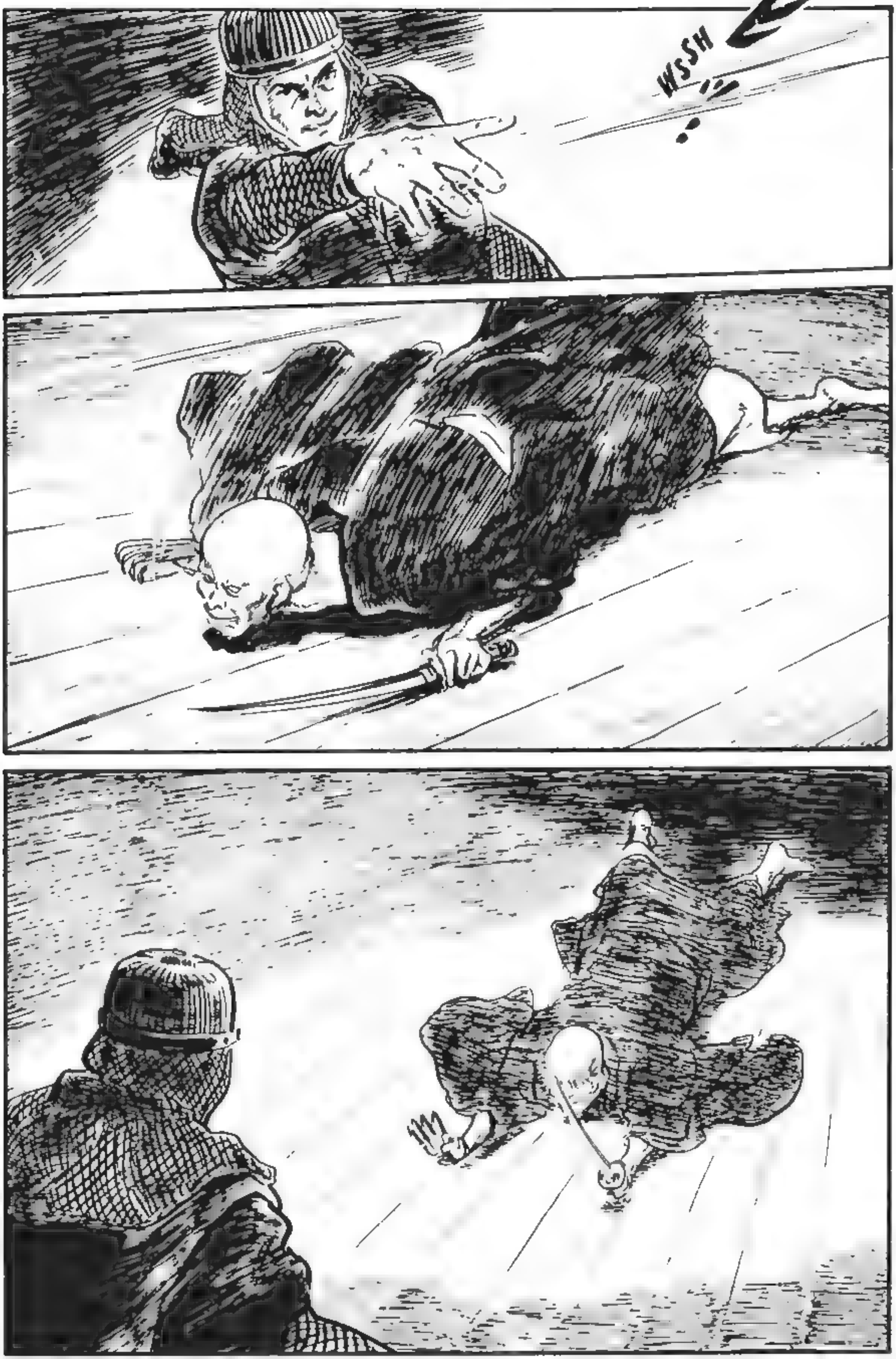
SHAAA






TOK
FSSH

IF YOU DIDN'T LET GO OF YOUR SWORD, YOU'D BE DEAD. HEE HEE HEE.
HEH HEH HEH. YOU'RE GOOD, HANZŌ.


WSSH

ZU
ZU
ZU
ZU

SNAKE TECH-NIQUE.

THAT'S RIGHT. HEH HEH HEH. THERE'S NO METHOD TO STOP THE MOTION OF A SNAKE, HANZŌ.

DASH

NO. I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE.
JUST TAKE MILORD SOMEWHERE SAFE.
DON'T INTER-FERE.
DID YOU SUGGEST SENDING IEYASU AWAY BECAUSE YOU'VE GIVEN UP HOPE OF DEFEATING ME, HANZŌ?
IF IT TURNS OUT YOU'RE INFERIOR TO HIM, I'LL EVENTUALLY BE ASSASSINATED ANYWAY.

MM?!

ORK!
ORK!

STAB HIM!

FSSS

SHLOCK

WHAT IS VILE ABOUT KILLING A SNAKE THIS WAY? THAT'S NONSENSE COMING FROM SOMEONE WHO STOLE IN TO MURDER MY LORD!

THA... THAT'S... VILE...

SHLOCK!

WHA...

PLEASE GRANT ME PERMISSION TO TERMINATE SHINGEN, I BESEECH YOU.

...THIS WILL BE OUR LAST MEETING IN THIS WORLD.

IF I FAIL...

ONLY YOU AND I WILL KNOW, MILORD. I'LL GO AFTER SHINGEN ALONE.

THE *SHICHIHŌDE*... ARE YOU GOING DISGUISED AS AN OLD MAN?

THIS MAY BE A LONG JOURNEY. LOOK AFTER WHAT I LEAVE BEHIND.

....
....

YEAH. I INTEND TO IMMERSE MYSELF IN IT.

WHERE TO?

UH HUH.

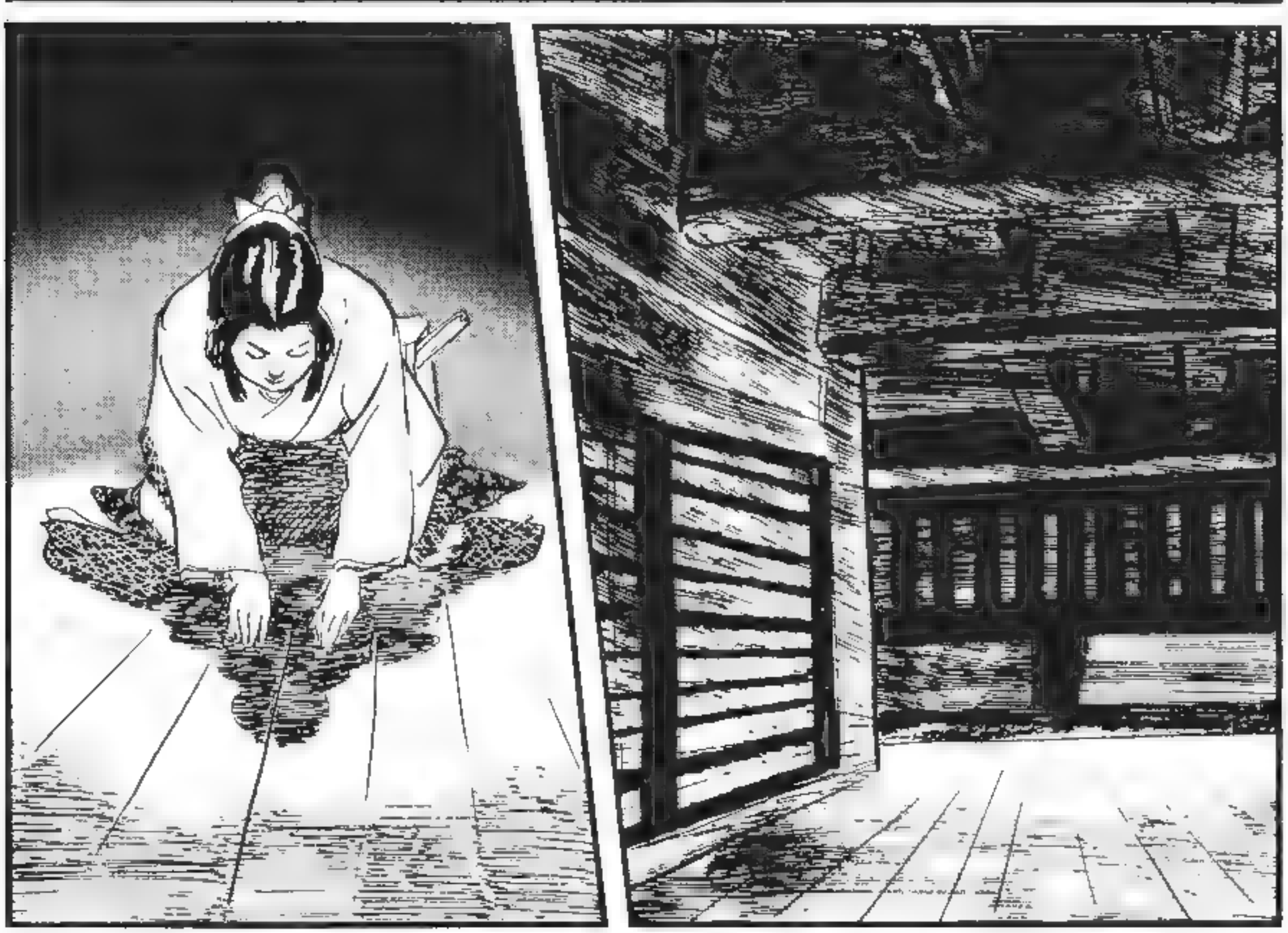
YOU'RE GOING SOMEWHERE YOU CAN'T EVEN TELL ME.

PROMISE...
PROMISE ME TO RETURN!
I DON'T WANT YOU TO DIE!

AND YOU WON'T EITHER.

IF I DON'T COME BACK, MIKAWA WILL PERISH. MILORD WILL HAVE NO FUTURE.

KOFUCHŪ,
KAI



NO SIR.

NAGAKUBI DIDN'T COME BACK THEN...

PROBA-BLY...

HE MUST'VE FAILED.

YES.

THAT'S JUST AS EXPECTED WITH THE PROTECTION OF HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA.

UR... M...

TARŌZA. WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

PLEASE SIR, I WOULD LIKE YOU TO TREAT ME LIKE THE HEAD OF *SUPPA*.

OYAKATA-SAMA, YOU YOURSELF TOLD ME TO BE A MAN AND LEAD THE TAKEDA *SUPPA* AS A MAN.

UNTIL YOU DO, I ORDER YOU TO SLEEP WITH ME.

TERMI-NATE HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA.

TO ASSASS-INATE ME.

...THERE'S A CHANCE HANZŌ WILL SHOW UP.

IF NAGAKUBI DID FAIL...

YES SIR.

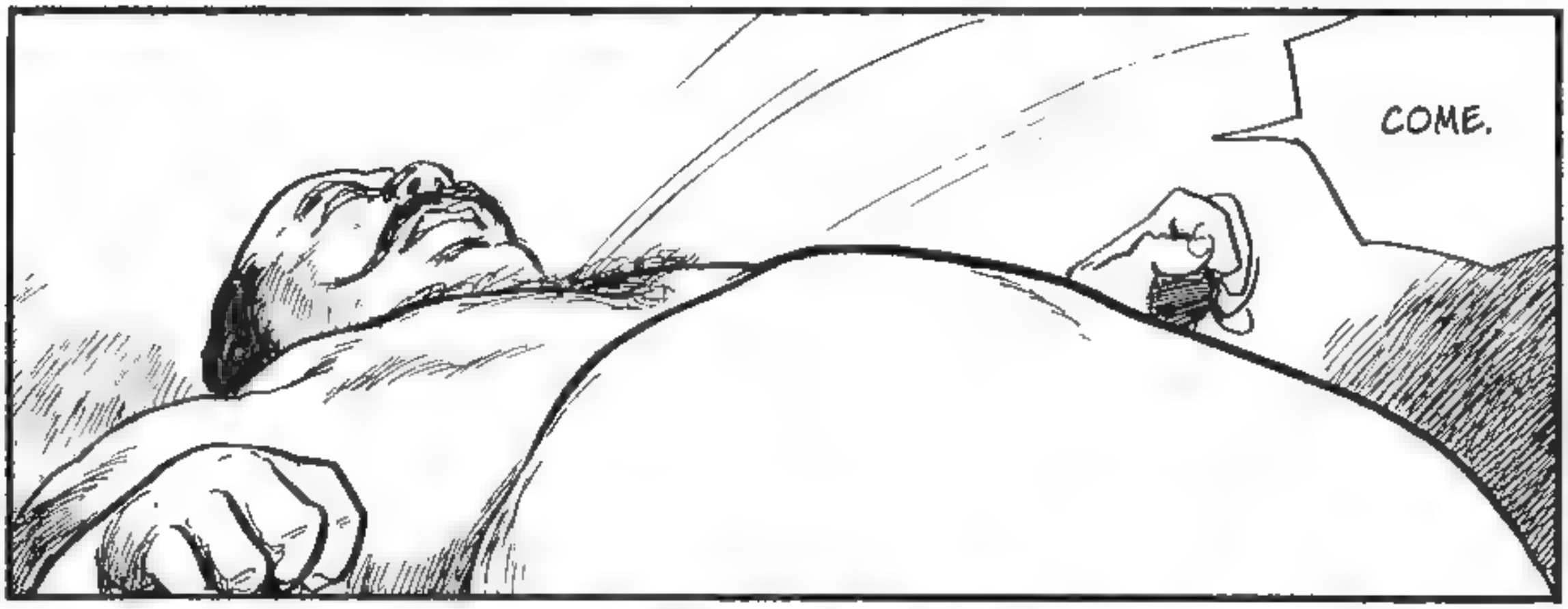
FIND HIM AND FINISH HIM. I WON'T FORGIVE FAILURE.

IT'S EITHER HE COMES OR INCREASES HIS OWN SECURITY. MOST LIKELY, HE'LL COME.

YES... SIR.

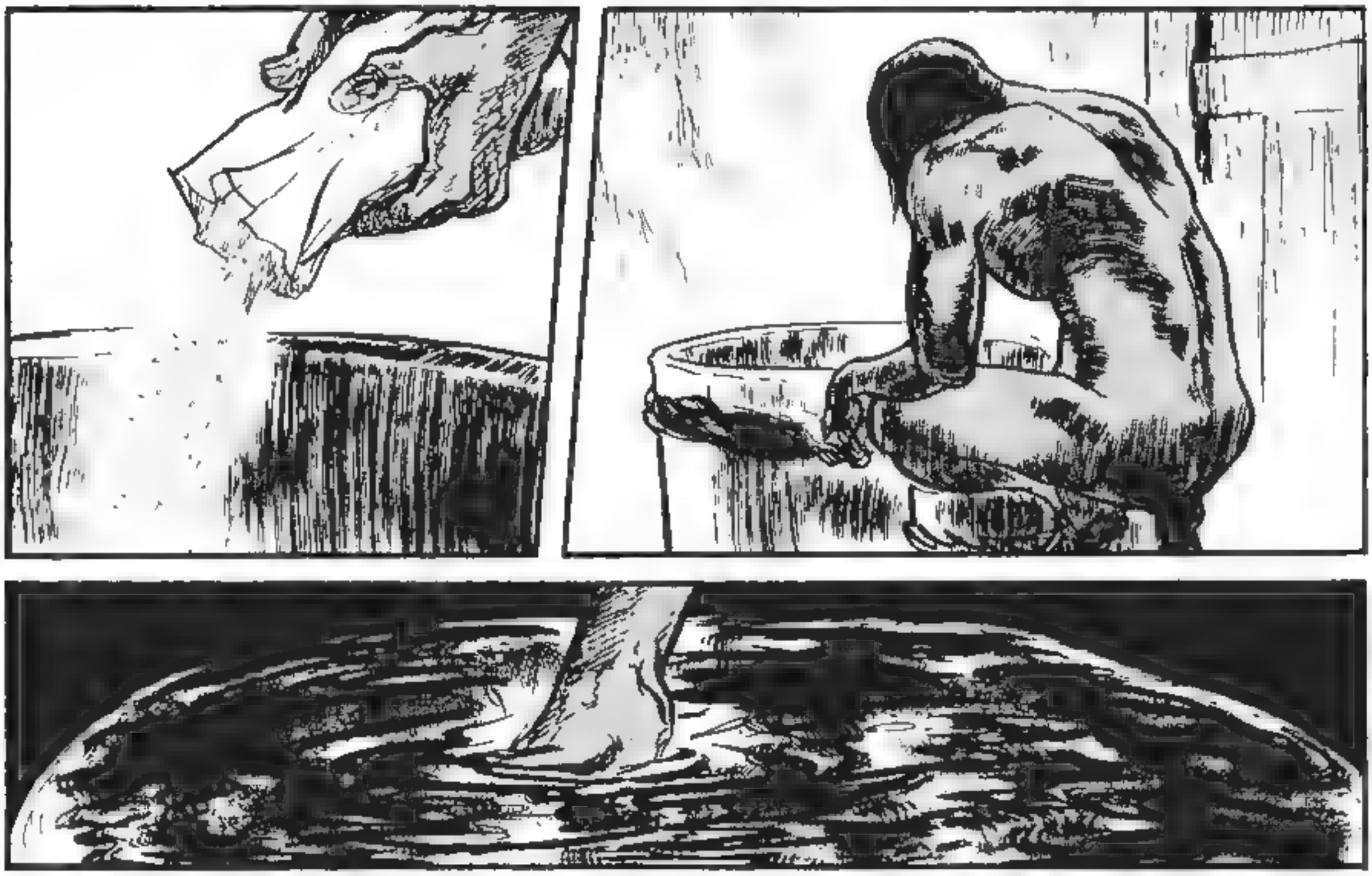
UNTIL THEN, YOU REMAIN A WOMAN. BECAUSE, AS A MAN, YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO KILL HANZŌ.

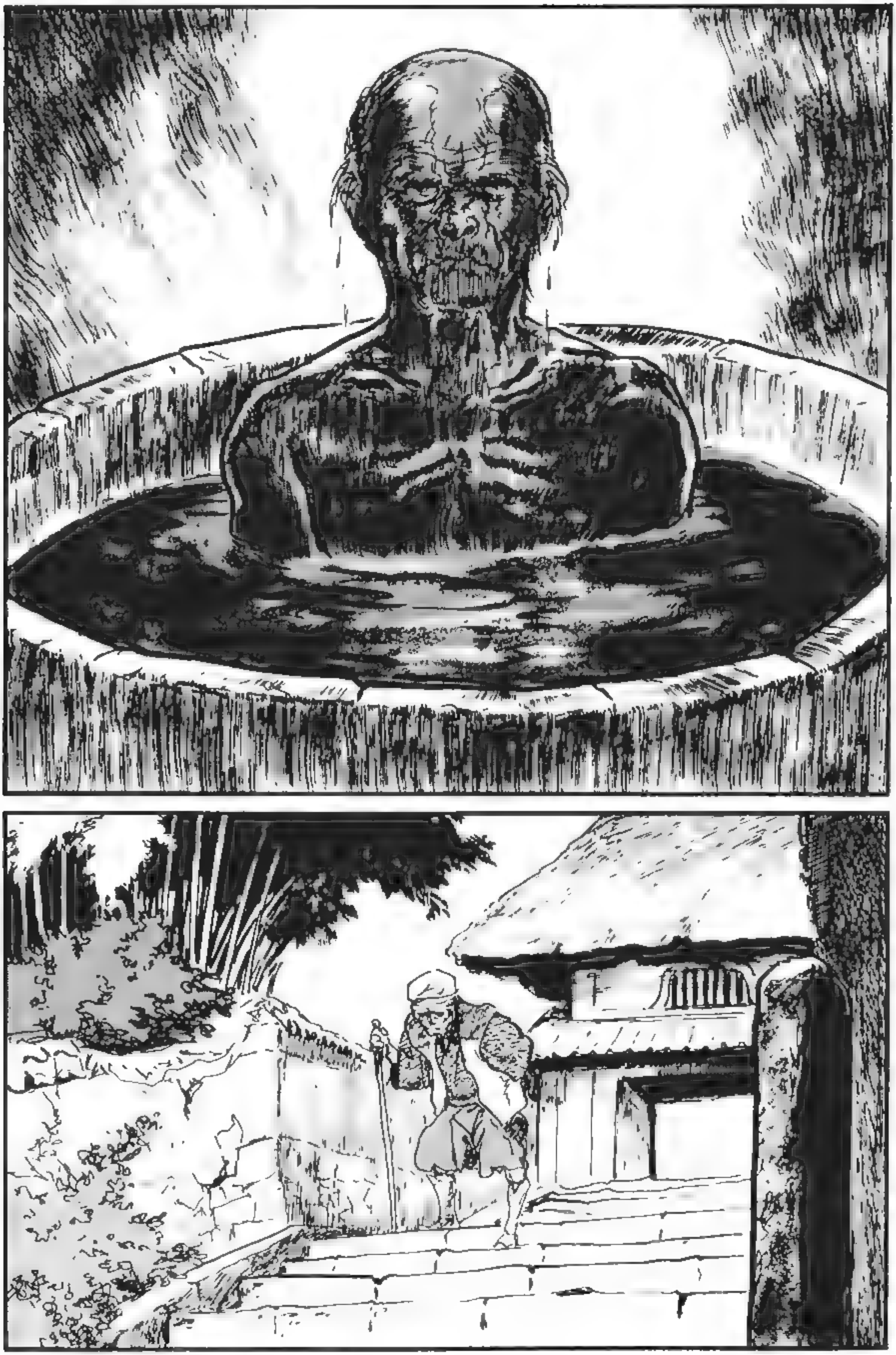
HEH HEH HEH HEH. OUR POSITIONS ARE SWAPPED NOW.
WE HAVE NO ONE BETTER THAN NAGAKUBI. IEYASU CAN'T BE TERMINATED AT THIS POINT EVEN IF I SEND OTHERS AFTER HIM.

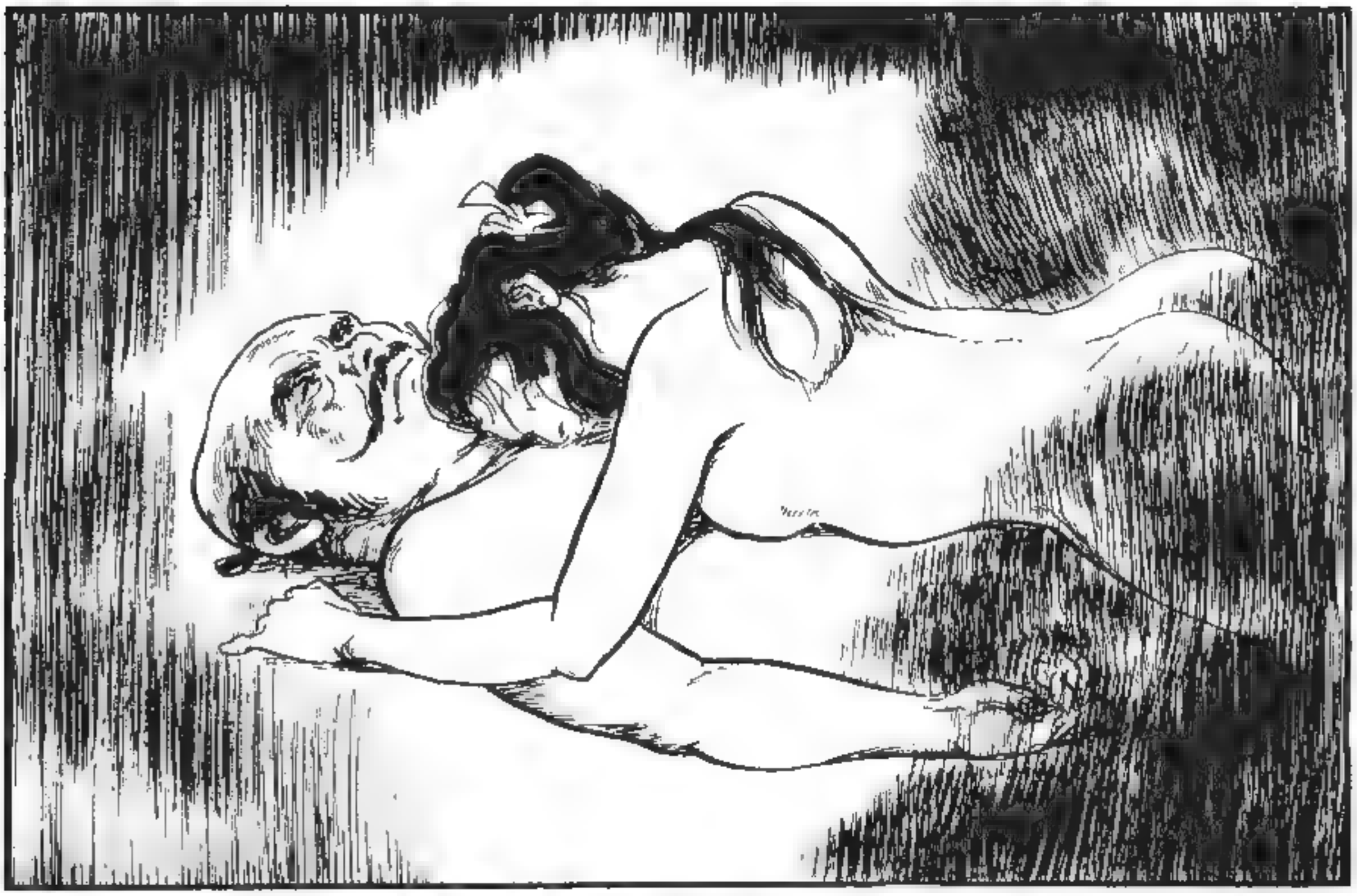

COME.

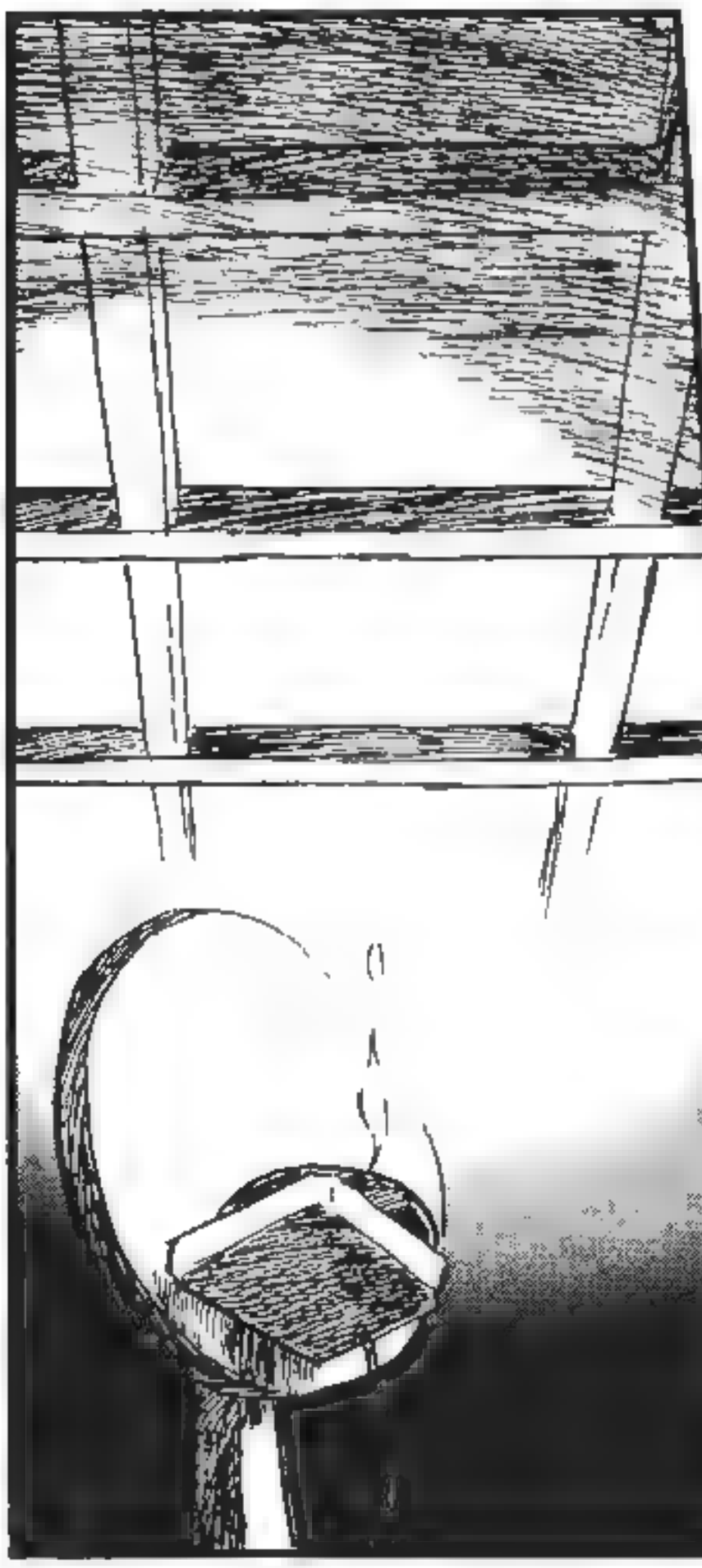
AH

AAHHHH









P... PLEASE PARDON...

I DESIRE YOUR FLUTE.

I SAID I DESIRE IT.

PUUT

PLEYUS
PSUWL
PSUBUS

HYURURUU

PYUYUUU

PUUU

HYOOO

HUUUUUU

SEE.

THROUGH MY MOVEMENTS I CAN FREELY MANIPULATE THE SOUND LONGER, SHORTER, FASTER AND FIERCER.

THERE.

I WILL MAKE IEYASU AND NOBUNAGA DANCE, AND I WILL BRING THE COUNTRY UNDER MY CONTROL. HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH.

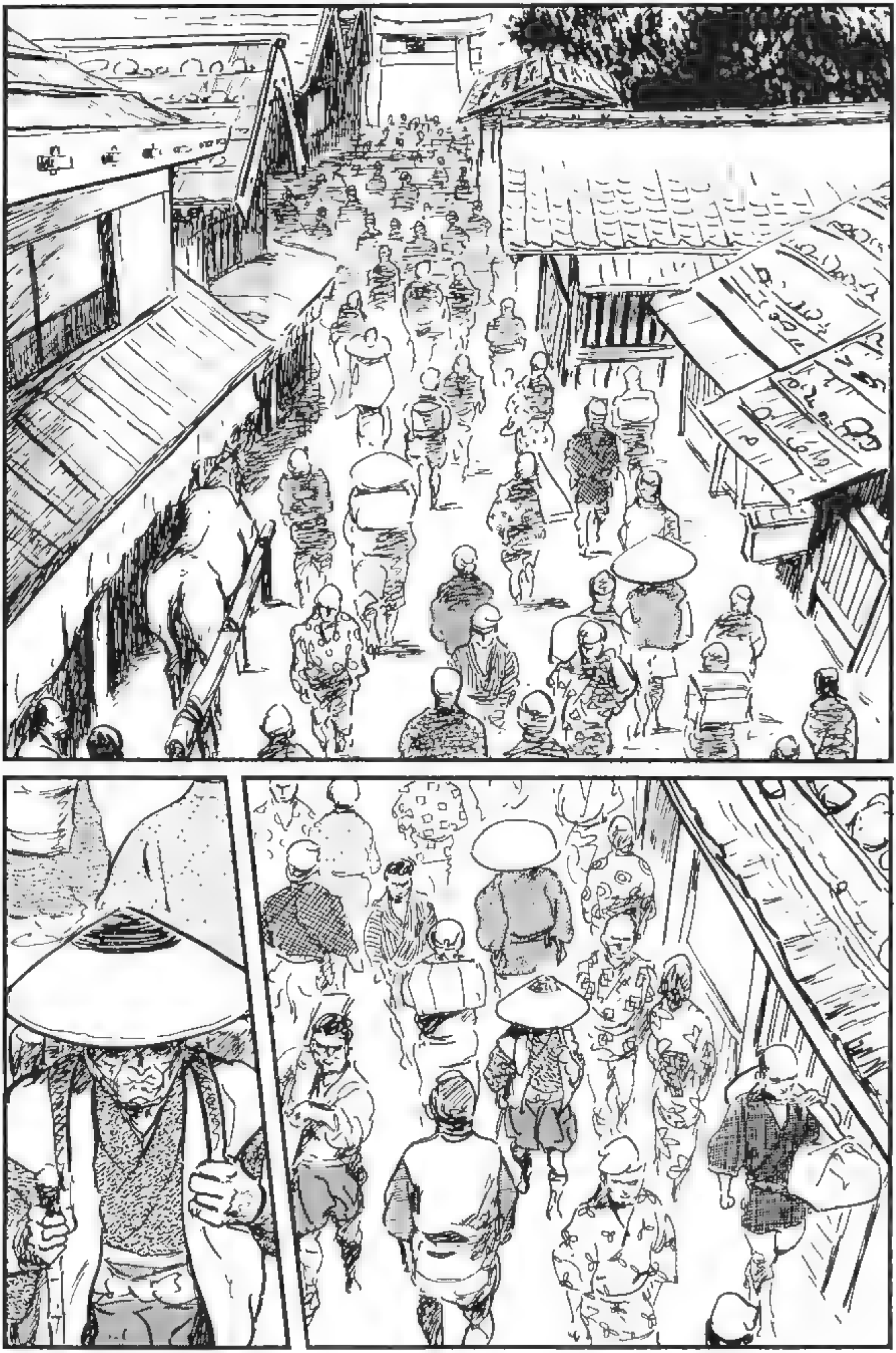
THEY SAY A FLUTE PLAYER CAN MAKE PEOPLE DANCE. IN THIS CASE, I CAN MAKE BOTH THE FLUTE PLAYER AND THE PEOPLE DANCE. THAT'S MY KAI-STYLE MILITARY SCIENCE.

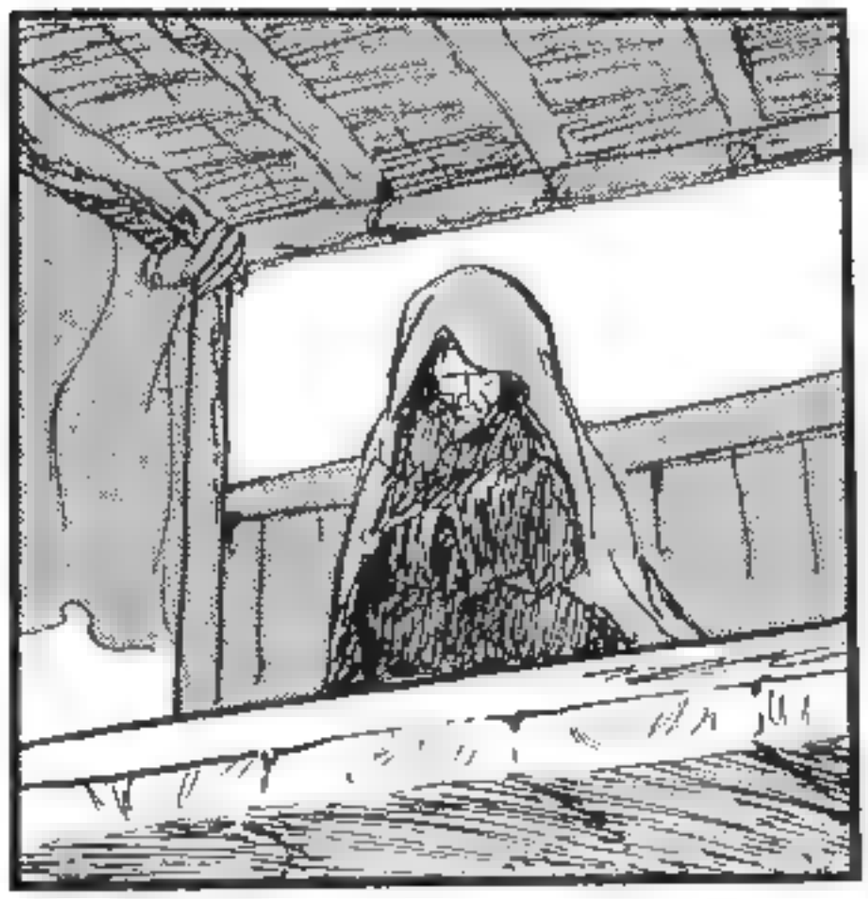
AHHH

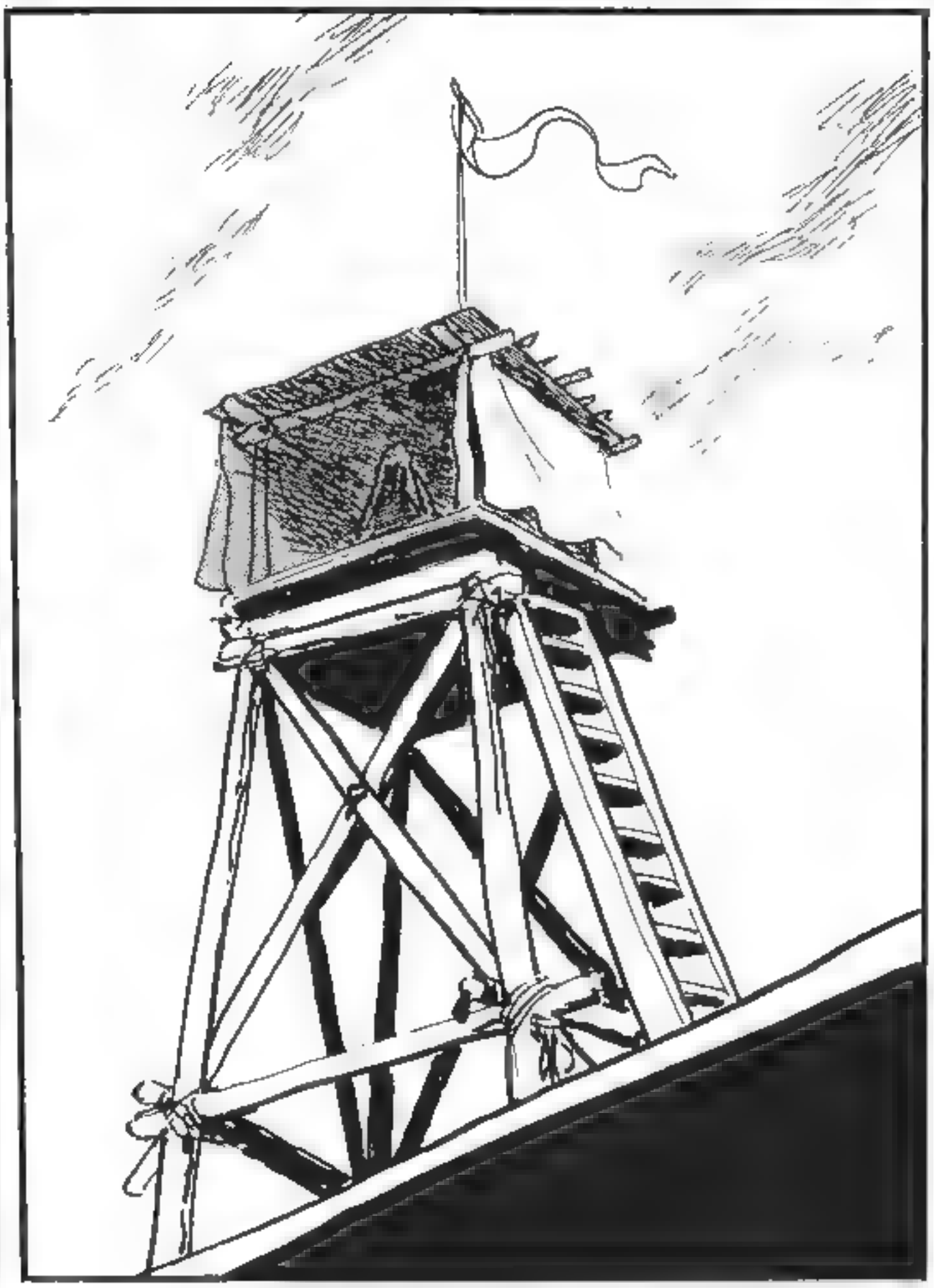
AND YET EVEN I CANNOT MAKE HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA, DANCE.

TARŌZA! YOU MUST TERMINATE HANZŌ WITHOUT FAIL!

I EXPECT HE'LL SHOW UP. BECAUSE THAT'S THE ONLY WAY MIKAWA CAN SURVIVE.







THEY'RE NICKNAMED SATORI OR SOMETHING... I THINK.

SITTING UP THERE ARE THE EXPERIENCED OLD *SUPPA* OF TAKEDA.

THAT MUST BE IT. THE TOWER FOR UNMASKING *SUPPA*.

WITHOUT EXCEPTION, EVERY *SUPPA* WHO SNEAKS IN FROM OTHER PROVINCES GETS EXPOSED...OR SO I HEAR.

HEY YOU! OLD MAN OVER THERE!

BUT THERE'S NO WAY HE'D SPOT ME AS AN EIGHTY-YEAR-OLD GEEZER.

THAT'S RIGHT. COME UP HERE. LET'S HAVE A DRINK.

WHAT? IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY?

ME, YOU MEAN?

YOU, THE ONE WITH A LOAD ON YOUR BACK!

BECAUSE ONCE I MAKE YOU DRINK *SAKE*, IT'S EASY TO FIND OUT IF YOU ARE INDEED AN OLD MAN.

I DON'T DRINK, BUT...WHY ME?

HMPH. DUNNO WHAT'S GOING ON. BUT, OH, WELL, WHY NOT.

JUST COME UP. I'LL GIVE YOU SOME MONEY TOO.

AND IF YOU ARE A *SUPPA*, IT'S A GOOD DEAL FOR ME.

IF YOU ARE AN AVERAGE OLD MAN, A FREE DRINK IS A GOOD DEAL, ISN'T IT?

WHY DID HE CHOOSE ME? THERE ARE LOTS OF OLD MEN AROUND.

HERE. DRINK UP.

SHLUP

HMM.

ALL RIGHT THEN.

MM?!

I BET YOU ARE HANZŌ-*DONO*, THE BEST OF IGA, AREN'T YOU?

SLURP

I'M CHŌSUKE, A NEEDLE PEDDLER FROM ŌMI.

YOU GOT THE WRONG MAN. BUT I WON'T PAY FOR THE *SAKE*. AFTER ALL, IT'S YOU WHO TOLD ME TO DRINK.

THANKS FOR THE DRINK.

HEY, HANZŌ-DONO.

WHAT?!

I HAD A NUMBING DRUG MIXED IN WITH THE *SAKE* YOU DRANK JUST NOW.

DID YOU SAY SOME-THING?

YOU KNOW, EVERY *SUPPA* WHO SNEAKS IN--ALMOST ALL OF THEM, WITHOUT EXCEPTION, TAKE AN ANTIDOTE CALLED *IBUKI BŌFŪ* AHEAD OF TIME. SO THE NUMBING DRUG NEVER WORKS ON THEM.

NUMBING... WHAT AGAIN?

?! DUNNO WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.

HIS EYES DIDN'T EVEN MOVE.

HE SHOWED NO FEAR OR CAUTION.

HM. HE SHOWED NO REACTION TO THE *SUPPA* PROBING OF MINE.

BUT STILL, SOMETHING ABOUT HIM BOTHERS ME.

MAYBE HE IS A PLAIN OLD MAN AFTER ALL.

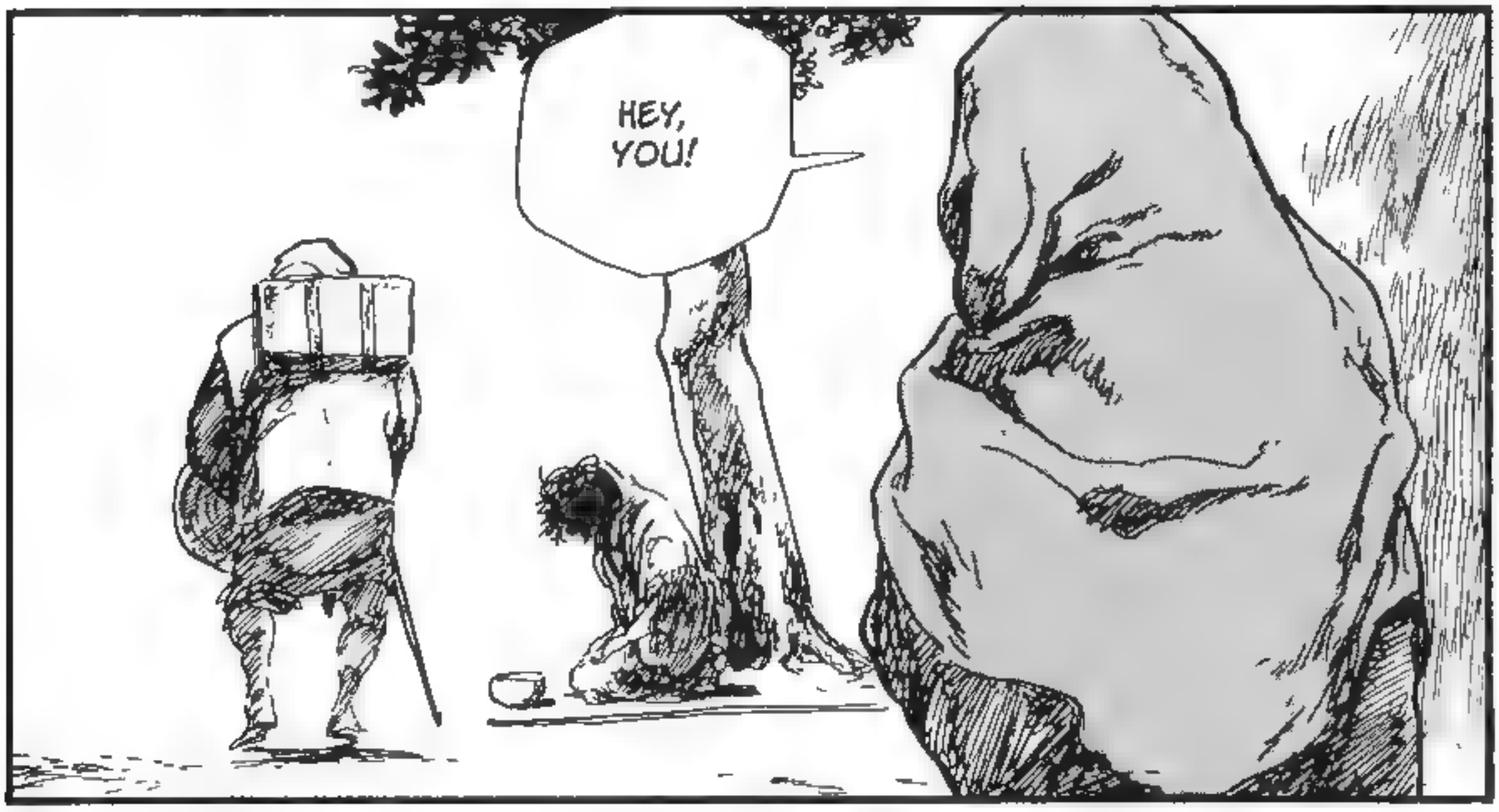
THERE WAS NOTHING AT ALL, AND THAT BOTHERS ME.

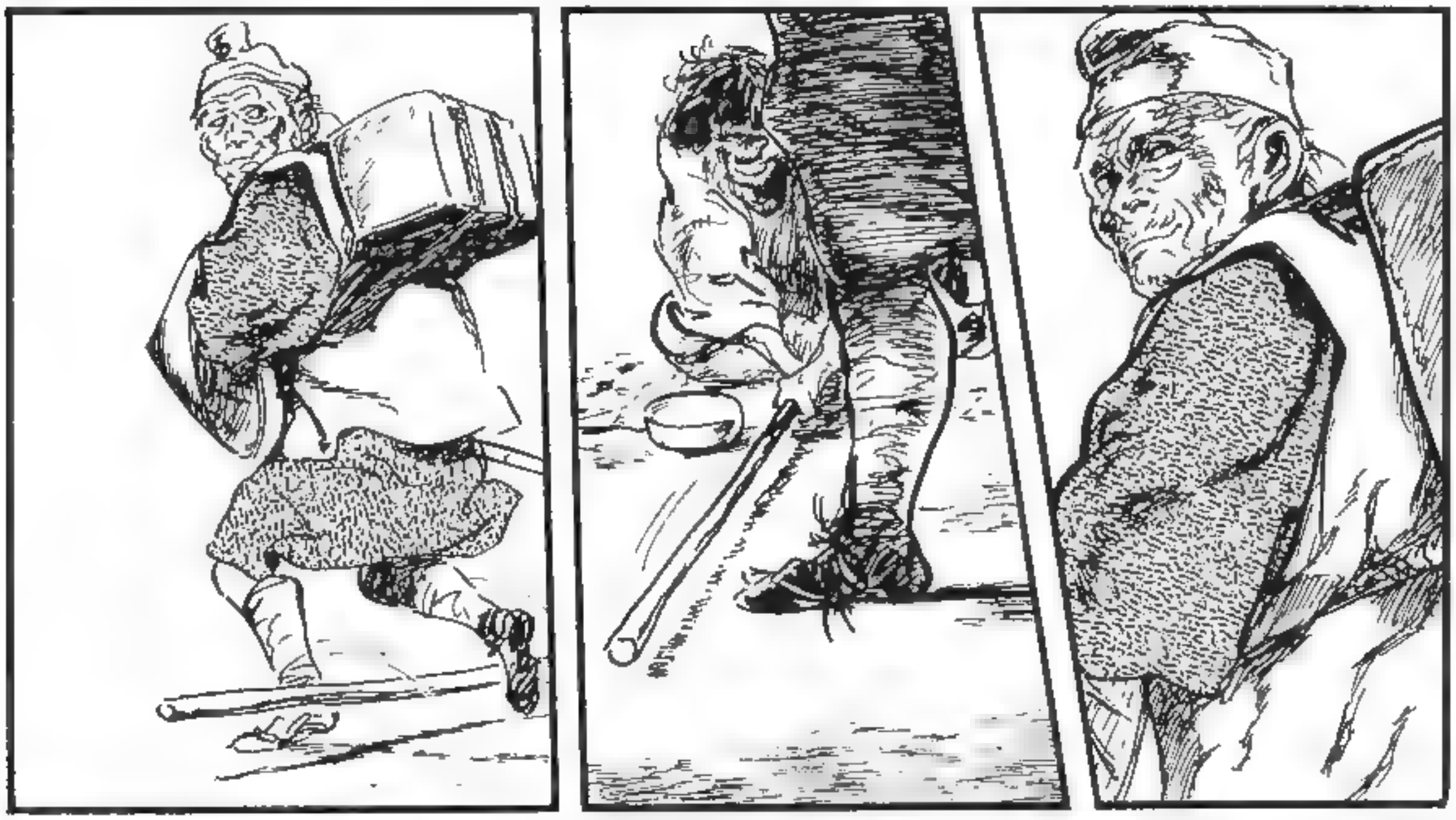
THIS IS JUST AS I SHOULD'VE EXPECTED FROM THE TAKEDA *SUPPA* INQUISITORS. THEIR PERCEPTIONS ARE SHARP. HE'S TAILING ME BASED ON NOTHING BUT A HUNCH...

IF HE FOLLOWS ME FOREVER, I WON'T BE ABLE TO DO ANYTHING. I GUESS IT'S TIME TO GET AN INDULGENCE.

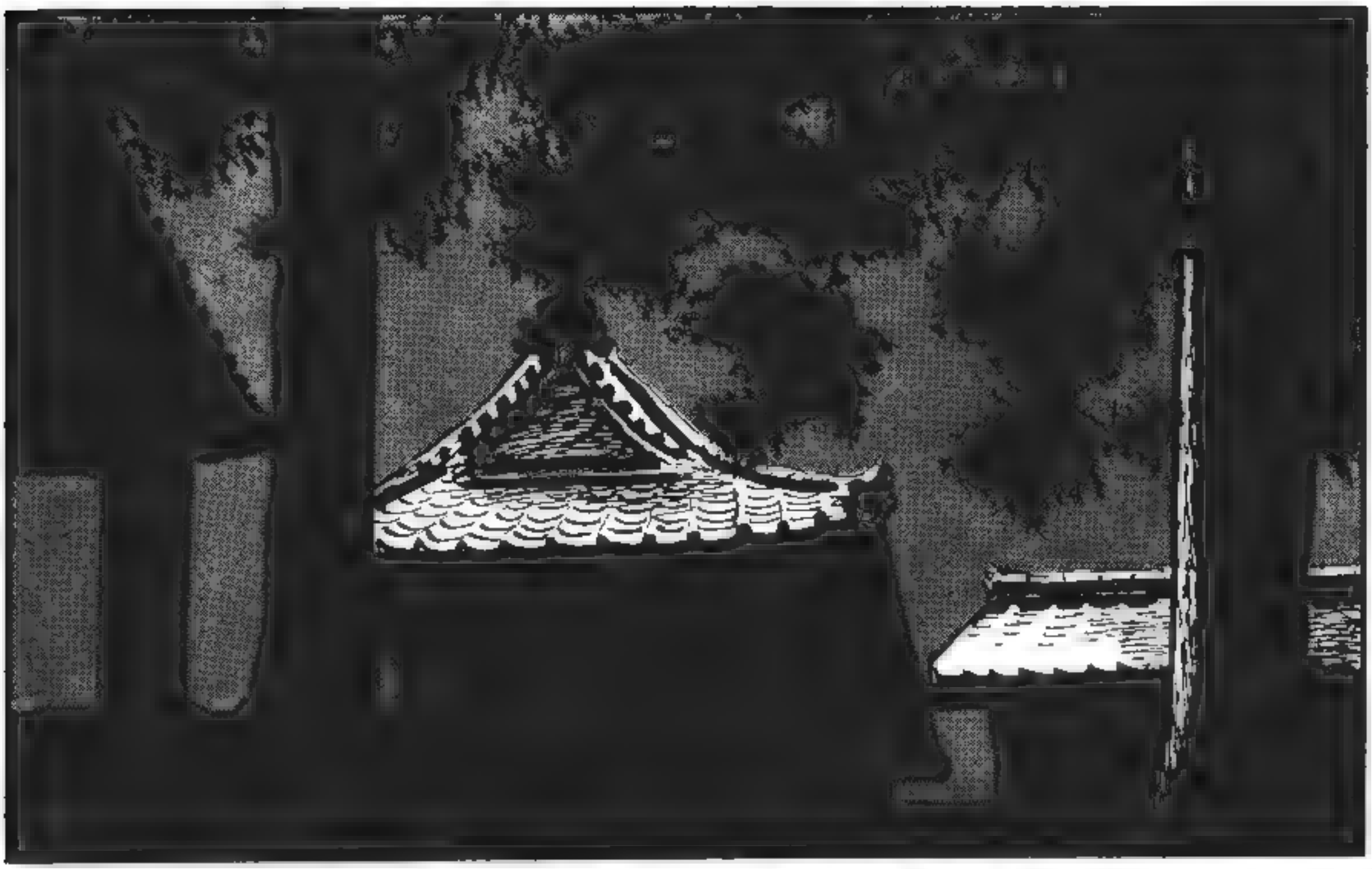
LET ME JUST BITE THEIR BAIT THEN.

I SEE. A PAIR OF THEM WILL TEST ME THIS TIME.


HEY, YOU!

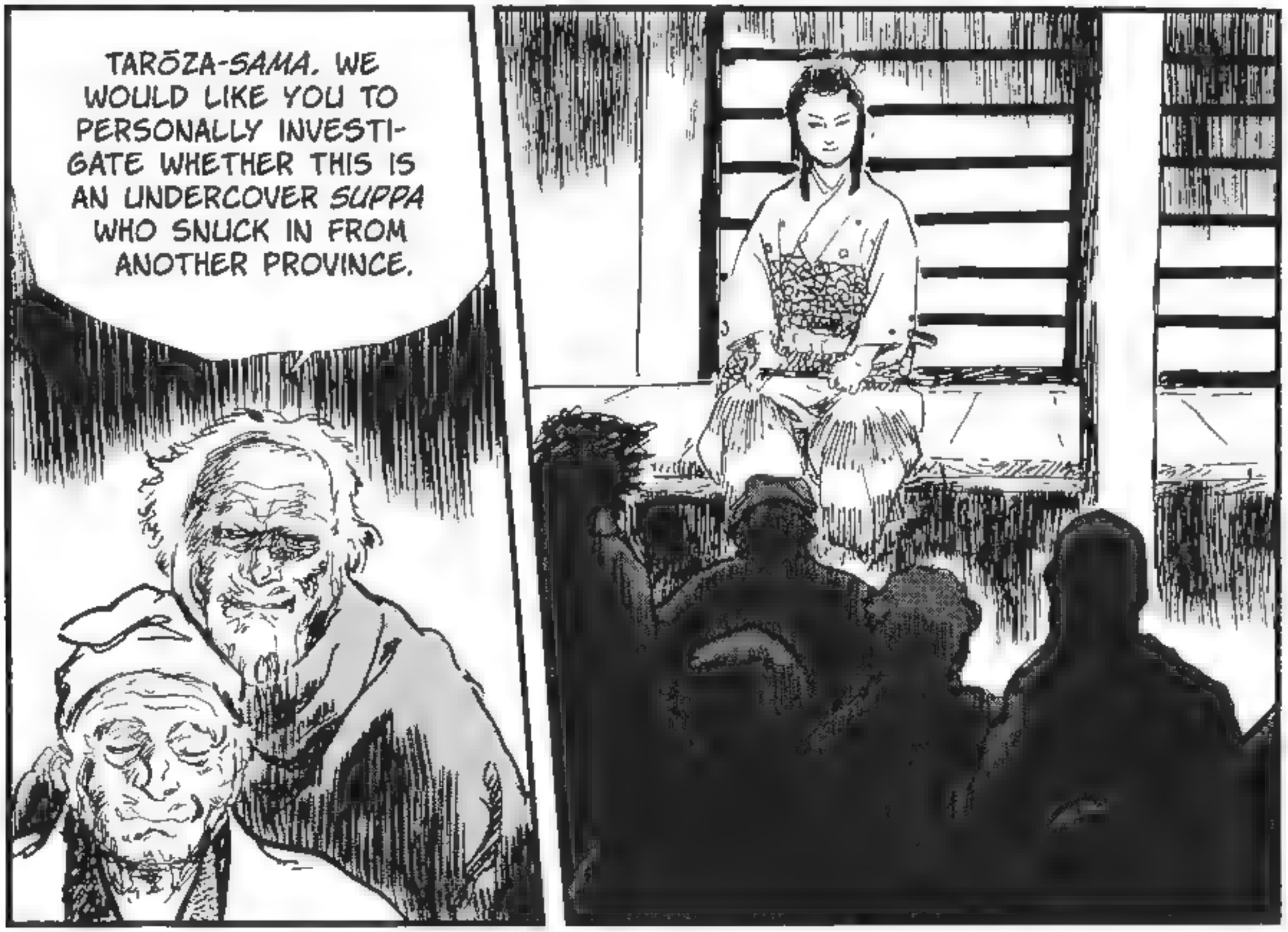


HE'S HOOKED! ON THE *SUPPA* TRAP!



HYUUUU
URURUUU

HYUUUU
PYOOOOO


TARŌZA-SAMA. WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO PERSONALLY INVESTIGATE WHETHER THIS IS AN UNDERCOVER SUPPA WHO SNUCK IN FROM ANOTHER PROVINCE.

HE IS SO CLEVER WE'VE EXHAUSTED EVERY METHOD TO UNMASK HIM.

YES.

ARE YOU TELLING ME YOU CAN'T HANDLE HIM YOURSELVES?

EVEN THOUGH HE WASN'T LOOKING.

HE CASUALLY DODGED A STICK I PLACED IN FRONT OF HIM.

WHAT'S CERTAIN IS-- HE IS NIMBLE. AND NOT ONLY THAT, HE HAS THE ABILITY TO INSTINCTIVELY SENSE DANGER WHEN IT APPROACHES.

I'M A NEEDLE PEDDLER. I TRAVEL ALL OVER THE PLACE. I'VE SLEPT IN THE OPEN OFTEN ENOUGH, AND I CAN EVEN SENSE A WILD RABBIT WHEN IT COMES NEAR.

HMPH! EVEN A KID CAN HOP OVER SOMETHING LIKE THAT!

MY DAUGHTER AND GRANDCHILDREN ARE ALL DEAD. THEY GOT TANGLED UP WITH THE WAR LAST YEAR. I'M ALONE IN THIS WORLD. IT'S HARD TO GO ON LIVING ANYWAY.

OH WELL. IF YOU THINK I'M SUSPICIOUS-- A *SUPPA* OR WHATEVER-- WHY DON'T YOU JUST KILL ME?

IT SEEMS UNLIKELY HE'S LYING....

YOU SEE HOW HE IS? HE HAS NO TREPIDATION WHATSO-EVER.

I'M NOT LYING.

CAPTURING A GEEZER LIKE ME AND GABBING AWAY LIKE THAT.

YOU FOLKS, WHATEVER YOU ARE, MUST HAVE TOO MUCH TIME.

WHAT A PRETTY MAN YOU ARE. ARE YOU SHINGEN-SAMA'S CATAMITE OR WHAT?

BUT LET ME GRANT YOU A WISH BEFORE I KILL YOU. NOW TELL ME WHAT IT IS.

FINE. LET ME KILL YOU THEN. INDEED, IT'S TIRESOME TO KEEP ASKING IF AN OLD MAN IS WHITE OR BLACK.

I DON'T DRINK MUCH *SAKE*, SO A LITTLE OF IT WILL DO.

FIRST, I WANNA FEAST. EAT AS MUCH AS I WANT.

I MAY NOT LOOK IT, BUT I'VE MADE IT WITH LOTS OF WOMEN--AS MANY AS THERE ARE STARS--BUT NEVER WITH A MAN.

I WANNA SLEEP WITH YOU. EE HEE HEE HEE.

AND THEN.

MWA HA HA HA HA. I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO TRY DOING IT WITH A CATAMITE.

MHO HO HO. I GUESS I CAN.

DUNNO IF I CAN, BUT...

YES.

HAVE HIM TAKE A BATH AND EAT, AND THEN BRING HIM TO MY SLEEPING QUARTERS.

MHO HO HO HO.

IF I GET TO HAVE IT OFF WITH YOU, I'LL GIVE YOU MY LIFE AS MANY TIMES AS YOU WANT!

AHHH, WHAT PARADISE!

IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S JUST A PLAIN OLD MAN AFTER ALL.

BUT REALLY, THAT GEEZER... LET'S SEE IF HE'LL BLURT OUT HIS TRUE COLOR.

HER PITY TOWARD THE CONDEMNED.

SO IT'S TARŌZA-*SAMA'S* WHIMSY AGAIN.

NOT EVEN A DROP OF WATER WILL ESCAPE US.

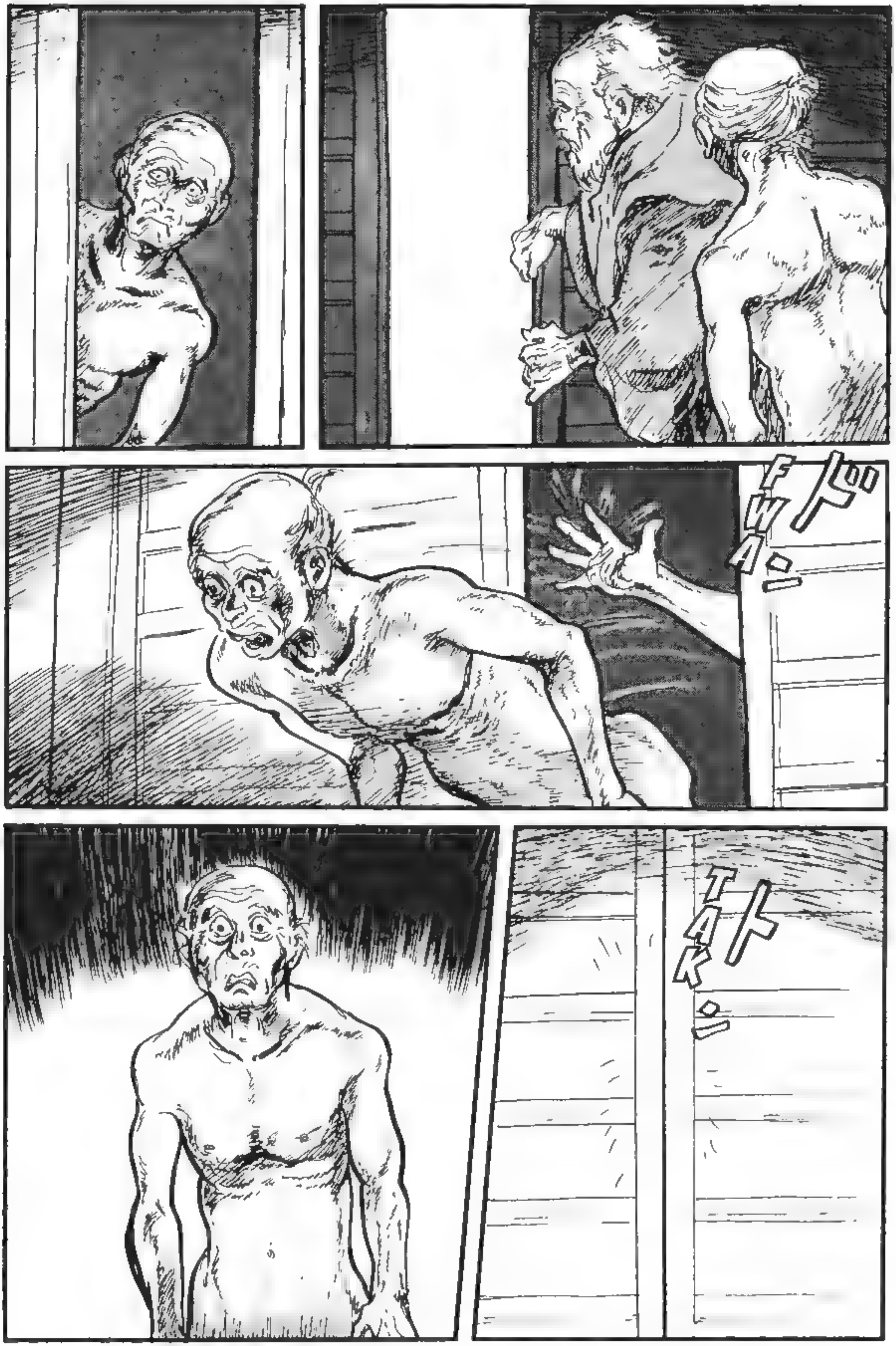
BUT IT'S NOT DEFINITE YET. WE MUST NOT LOWER OUR GUARDS.

IT'S NOT BAD TO LIVE LONG, I SAY. MHO HO HO HO.

YUMMY.

MUNCH MUNCH MUNCH

CHOMP CHOMP CHOMP


ГУЛЬ
ТАК!

YOUR BEING A WOMAN IS FINE. MHO HO HO HO.

NOT AT ALL!

ARE YOU BOWING OUT BECAUSE I'M NOT A MAN?

OHO! YOU ARE A *WOMAN.*

THIS IS PARADISE!

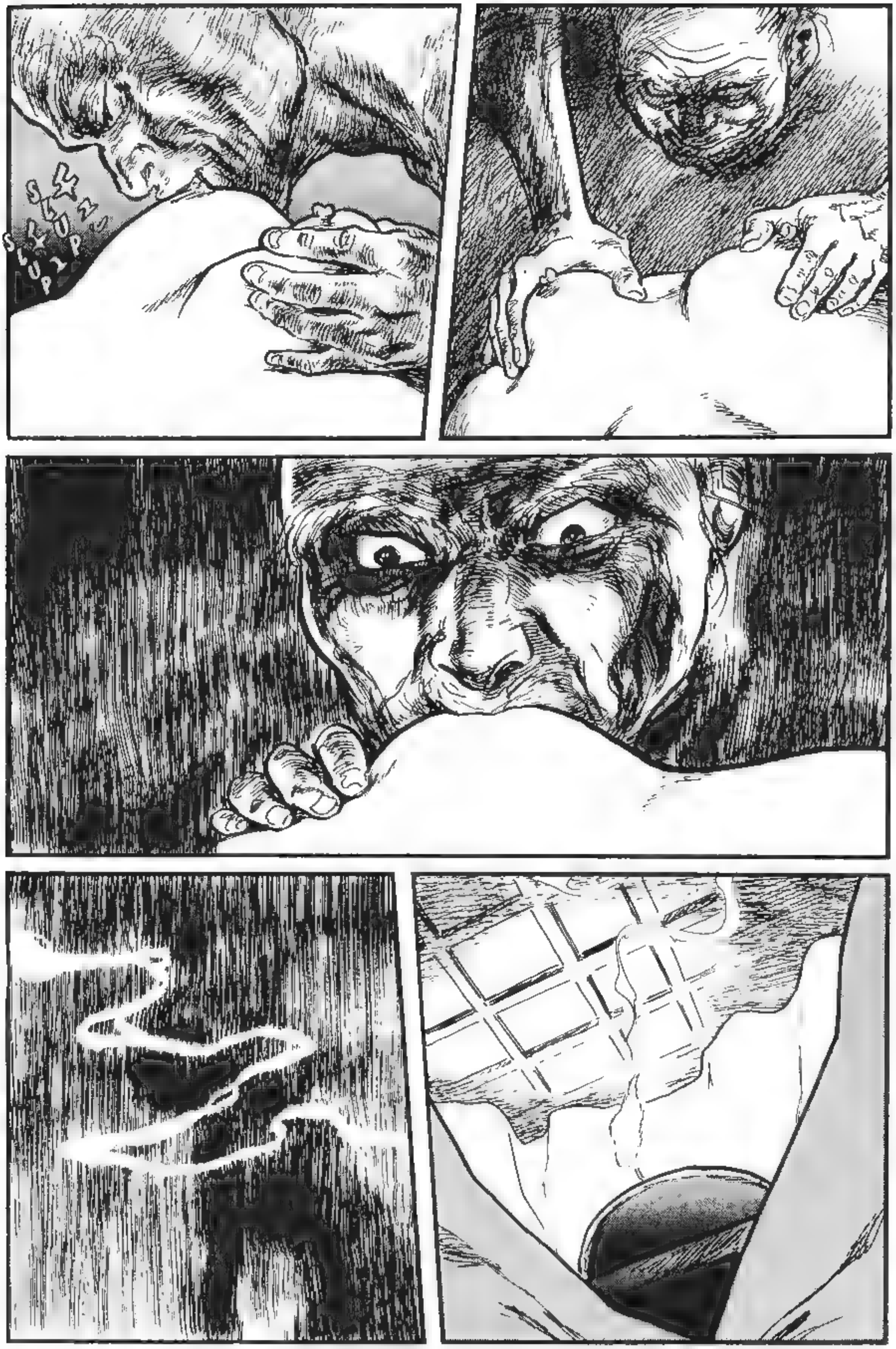
FULL OF LUSTER...

SO SMOOTH...

MHO HO HO HO.

IT'S PARA-DISE...

AND FIRM...


SLUP
SLUP
SLUP

...OF MY DAUGHTER.

IF SHE WAS STILL ALIVE, SHE'D BE ABOUT YOUR AGE, I THINK.

YOU REMINDED ME...

WHAT'S THE MATTER?!

THE VILLAGE WELL WAS SITUATED ONLY ABOUT A HUNDRED STEPS FROM OUR HOUSE.

ONLY A HUNDRED STEPS!

THAT WAS THE END OF MY DAUGHTER. RAPED AND KILLED...

APPARENTLY A COUPLE OF *OCHIMUSHA* WERE DRINKING THERE.

I HEARD SHE WENT TO FETCH SOME WATER, BELIEVING THAT THE FIGHTING WAS PRETTY MUCH OVER.

AFRAID OF *OCHIMUSHA*, NO ONE CAME OUT OF THEIR HOUSES, YOU SEE.

WHEN I GOT BACK FROM MY TRAVELS, I SAW HER BODY STILL BESIDE THE WELL.

HER BODY... IT WAS STILL FIRM AND FULL OF LUSTER.
I WASHED HER BODY.
I WANNA... DIE.
I'VE HAD ENOUGH.
FOLLOW ME.

YES.

OPEN UP.

GRM

GRM GRM

OH.

THERE'S AN ENTRANCE TO PARADISE ON THE OTHER SIDE.

SO WHAT'S INSIDE?

IT'S THE ENTRANCE TO HELL. GO IN.

BUT IT'S BETTER FOR A WOMAN TO LIVE LIKE A WOMAN.

I KNOW YOU FOLKS ARE DOING THIS FOR THE FLAG CALLED TAKEDA.

EVEN IF I GET KILLED, I WON'T HOLD A GRUDGE AGAINST ANYONE.

TO LIVE IS A PAINFUL THING, ISN'T IT?

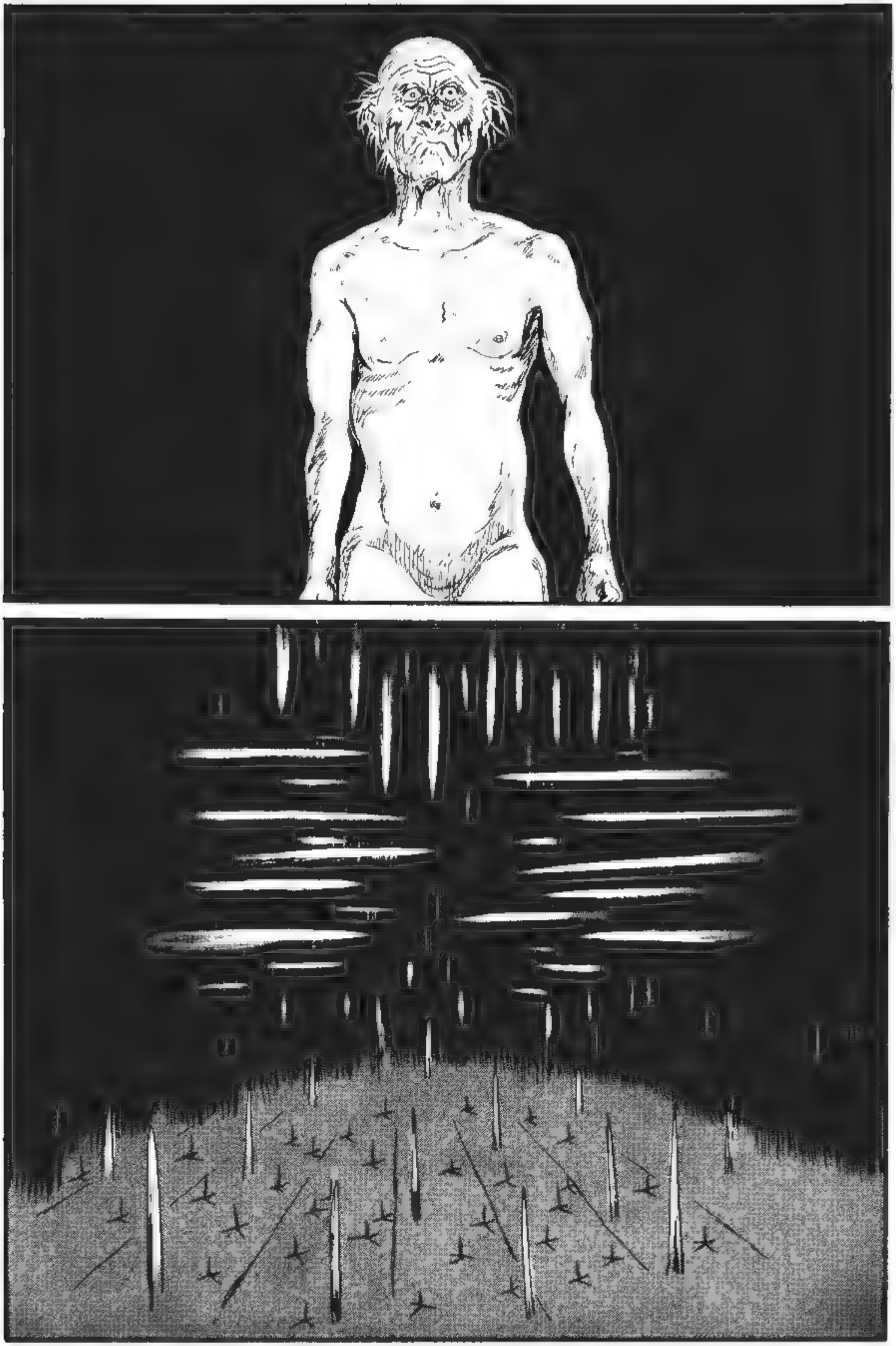
YOU KNOW...

AND YET, IT'S NOT POSSIBLE TO SURVIVE THAT WAY THESE DAYS.

GRRRRM

KILL!

FOR YOU TOO.



GLOSSARY

Akiyama Nobutomo
(1531–1575) A retainer in the service of the Takeda family who served under Takeda Shingen and Takeda Katsuyori

Asakura Kagetake
An officer of the Asakura clan. Kagetake served as the grand general during the battle of Anegawa.

ayakashi
A mask used in *noh* theater that represents a vindictive or violent ghost, god, or powerful warrior.

daimyō
Feudal lords

fuchū
A provincial capital; the seat of a local government, a provincial office

fūrinkazan
Literally, "wind, forest, fire, and mountain." It was the battle flag used by Takeda Shingen, quoting *The Art of War*: "Move as swift as a wind, stay as silent as the forest, attack fierce like fire, unmovable defense like a mountain."

guiqulai
From the famous poem of Tao Yuanming, one of the most influential pre–Tang dynasty Chinese poets. It translates to "homecoming" or "returning home."

Hiraiwa Chikayoshi
(1542–1611) A trusted retainer under Tokugawa Ieyasu. It is known that Chikayoshi was a tutor to the eldest son of Ieyasu, Matsuraida Nobuyasu

Hōjō Ujimasa
(1538–1590) The fourth head of the late Hōjō clan, and *daimyō* of Odawara.

Hojo Ujiyasu
(1515–1571) The son of Hōjō Ujitsuna and a great *daimyō* of the Odawara Hōjō clan.

hōmyō
A Buddhist name. A kind of rank in the Buddhist temple.

Honda Heihachirō Tadakatsu
Also called Honda Heihachirō, he is generally regarded as one of Tokugawa Ieyasu's finest generals, and he fought in almost all of his master's major battles

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Path of the Assassin*
dono – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures.
sama – used for superiors. Sometimes spoken as *"saa."*
san – the most common, used among equals or near equals
sensei – used for teachers, masters, respected entertainers, and politicians.

Igamono
"Men of Iga."

Inaba Ittetsu
(1515–1588) Also known as Inaba Yoshimichi. Was an officer under the Saito clan, and one of the famed "Mino three" during the Sengoku period (early sixteenth century) and the Azuchi-Momoyama period of the late sixteenth century.

jizamurai
Literally, "samurai of the land," "samurai of the soil." *Jizamurai* were rural samurai who often lived close to the land and were not entirely removed from the peasantry.

Kakegawa
A river that runs through the western part of Shizuoka prefecture. It is also the name of a city located in Shizuoka prefecture

Kofu
A city in Kai province (today's Yamanachi prefecture).

Lake Hamana
A lake situated in the western part of Shizuoka prefecture (formerly Totomi), on the border with Aichi prefecture.

measurement
1 *kan* = 8.27 lb.
200 *kan* = 1,653.47 lb
6 *monme* = 0.79 oz
1 *li* = 3.93 km

Mori Yoshinari
(1523–1570) Yoshinari started his days by serving under the Saito clan of Mino. Not until around 1555 did he start serving under the Oda clan. He ended up being killed while fighting against the Asai and Asaku in a alliance near Otsu, in 1571

Mt. Tennō
A mountain facing the Otokoyama (literally, "man's mountain") across the Yodo River. Commanding the routes out of the Kyoto basin, this was a strategically important mountain in military terms and also for transport. Often referred to in popular speech as "tennozan."

nokizaru
Ninja

Okudaira Sadakatsu
The son of Okudaira Sadamasa and the father of Okudaira Sadayoshi.

onriedo
The text of a sutra, meaning "Leave the depraved land. Pursue the peaceful world."

oyakata
A term used to address the head of the clan by the clan members. It translates to "house lord."

saisaku
Ninja spy/ninja spies

Sekinen Hachiya
The first son of Ihoro Sekinen, who started the Hachiya clan. Every successor also used the same name, Hachiya Kakubei Sekinen

suppa/shinobi
Ninja.

Suwa clan
The Suwa clan of the Shinano province had more or less unknown ancestors. Even though this is true, many believe that the Suwa clan is descended from Minamoto Tsunetomo. During the middle of the sixteenth century, the Suwa were defeated by the Takeda but later went on as vassals under them.

Takeda Nobutoyo
A son of Takeda Nobushige, who was a younger brother of Takeda Shingen. In other words, Nobutoyo was Shingen's nephew.

Takeda Yoshinobu
The eldest son and heir of Takeda Shingen.

Tokai region
A subregion of Chubu, Japan, along the Pacific Ocean. The name comes from Tōkaido, one of the Edo five routes

Tōtōmi province
An old province in the area of Japan that is today western Shizuoka prefecture.

umeboshi
A salty, tart condiment made from pickled Japanese plums.

Yamagata Masakage
(1524–1575) One of the twenty-four generals of the Takeda clan, he was famous for his red armor and skill on the battlefield

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman,* Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku,* a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

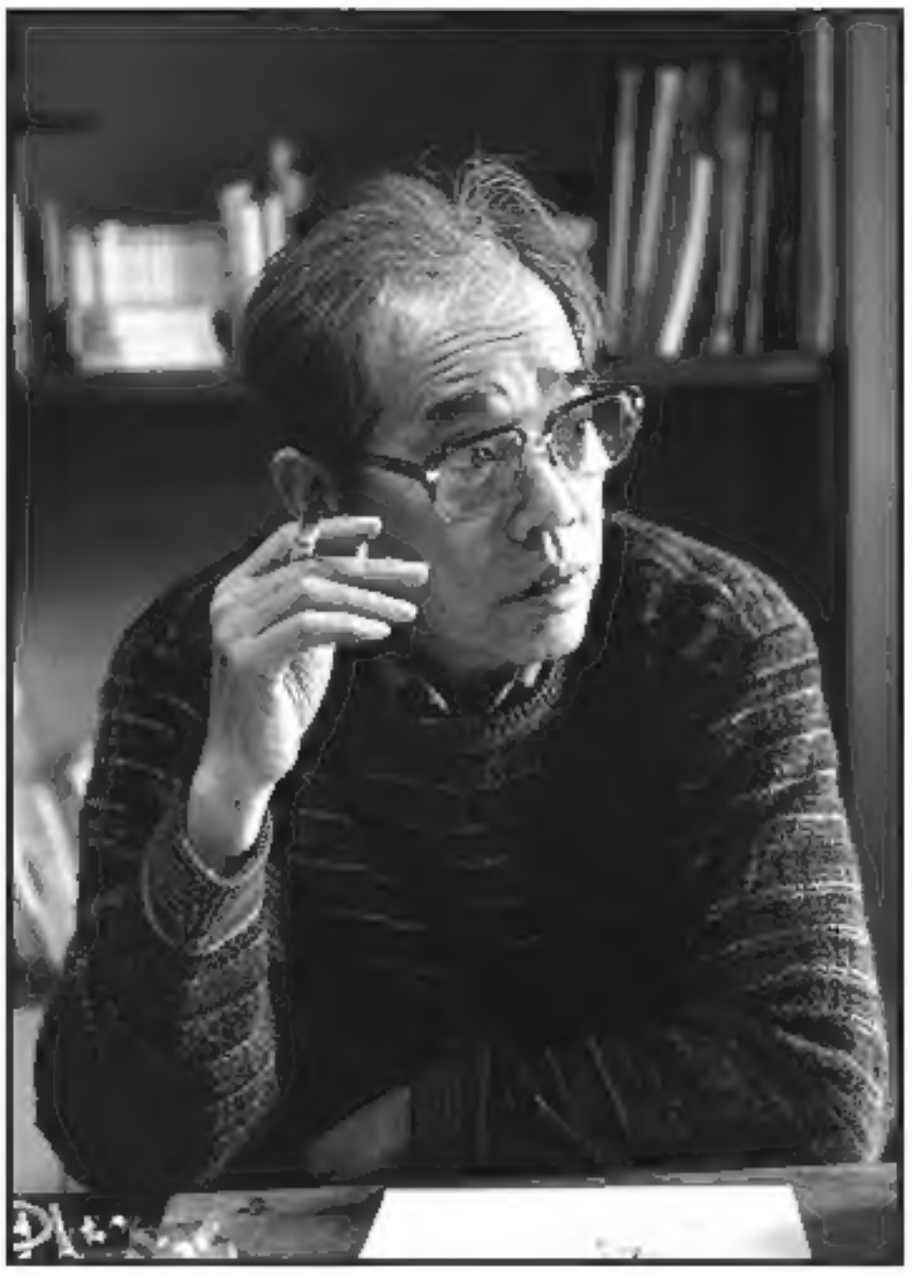
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai,* or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Many additional series would follow, including *Path of the Assassin* and *Samurai Executioner*.

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000, at the age of seventy-one.



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Published by Dark Horse Comics, Inc.
in association with Soeisha Inc.

Dark Horse Manga
A division of Dark Horse Comics, Inc.
10956 SE Main Street
Milwaukie OR 97222

www.darkhorse.com

First edition: July 2008
ISBN 978-1-59307-513-2

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in Canada

Path of the Assassin Vol. 12: Three Foot Battle
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GRAPHIC NOVEL / MANGA

In April, Genki Year 1 (1570 AD) the Oda-Tokugawa allied forces go on the warpath to Echizen to subjugate the Asakura clan, and they very nearly reach Asakura's main castle. However, Azai Nagamasa takes up arms against Nobunaga and shifts the balance of the war. Suddenly finding himself at a disadvantage, Nobunaga flees to the capital. On the way back to Gifu, though, Nobunaga is surprised by another danger—an assassin named Zenjubō, a master gunman also known as "double bullets." Hanzō, along with Koroku, attempts to thwart the assassination, but will they succeed . . . ?

Lone Wolf & Cub creators Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima are experts at weaving an intense and sometimes oddly sensational yarn, and this quasi-historical tale of a young man's rise to the top of samurai politics doesn't pull any punches.

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